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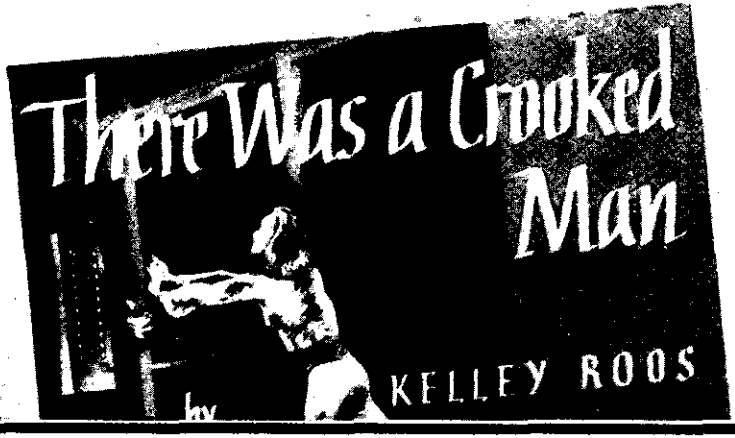

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE STORIES

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ANOTHER $250 IN CASH PRIZES

Here is the second in our series of reader-participation Prize Contests. Again we bring you a short-short by Clayton Rawson about his famous magician detective, the Great Merlini, and again we print the story without any solution whatever. For the benefit of those who did not see or read last month's issue, let us recapitulate the conditions and rules of these monthly contests: At the big moment in each story when the Great Merlini says he now knows the identity of the murderer, we stop the story and give you the opportunity to figure out the solution; you then write out your answer and submit it to us for a cash prize. Each month, as long as the contests continue, we will award $250 in currency of the realm — $100 for First Prize, and 30 additional prizes of $5 each; in the event of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded.

The judges are the members of EQMM's editorial staff. It is agreed, of course, that their decisions are final, and while we guarantee that every contestant has an equal chance to win and that every entry will be given personal consideration by the judges, we cannot undertake to return any submissions. The awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — which means (1) on the accuracy of your solution, and (2) on the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your reasoning.

The problems have been conceived and executed by Mr. Rawson with the greatest of care. They are calculated to be neither too difficult nor too easy. In other words, you do not have to be a mastermind to deduce the correct answer. We have tried to steer a middle course between the Scylla of too-hard-a-nut-to-crack and the Charybdis of soft-shell-simplicity. Even more important, the solutions are not complicated — indeed, we urge you strongly to write your solution in 50-to-100 words, on typewriter or in longhand, as you please.

The answers to this month's case must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than January 10, 1947, and we shall try our best to announce the winners in our March 1947 issue, on sale early in February 1947.

Now, join the Great Merlini in "The Clue of the Broken Legs." Then reflect, detect — and collect! There will be 31 cash prizes — so come and get 'em, and the best of luck to you all!

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THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN LEGS

by CLAYTON RAWSON

INSPECTOR Gavigan knelt in the glare of the police emergency light and replaced the automatic on the floor beside the body of Jorge Lasko, theatrical producer.

"His own gun," he said. "Two shots fired. One hit Lasko; the other smashed the only light in the room to smithereens. Brady, is there a phone in this place?"

The Sergeant nodded. "Yeah, it's downstairs in the library."

"Get on it," Gavigan ordered. "Find out what's keeping Merlini, and then bring those three suspects in here again."

The Great Merlini's voice came from the doorway behind them. "You won't need to phone, Brady. The marines have landed." Walking in, he added, "Did you say 'three suspects,' Inspector?"

Gavigan nodded. "Harold Kingsley, the novelist whose bestseller Lasko was adapting for production this fall; Dorothy Dawn, the famous star who's on leave from Hollywood to play the lead; and Marie Lasko, the victim's daughter."

"And Dorothy," Merlini said, "is also the ex-wife Lasko divorced six months ago."

"Which," the Inspector added, "probably gives her a motive. And Marie inherits her father's fortune, although I don't see why she'd want to kill him for it; she owns the world famous Lasko Parfums, Inc. As for Kingsley . . ." Gavigan scowled.

Merlini was looking at the overturned wheel-chair and the body beside it. "Plaster casts on both legs," he said. "How did that happen?"

"Auto accident a few weeks ago," Gavigan explained. "He's only been out of bed a day or two but insisted on being wheeled into his study here at five o'clock to do some work on the play script. He also apparently had some business to transact with a blackmailer. I found a record among his papers of some mysterious $1000 cash payments extending over the last six months." The Inspector pointed to the scattered hundred-dollar bills on the floor near the corpse. "There's just an even grand there. It looks to me like Lasko was making a payoff, an argument developed, Lasko drew a gun, and the blackmailer jumped him. In the struggle the wheel-chair tipped over and Lasko was shot."

Gavigan turned to a heavy-set individual who leaned against the wall chewing thoughtfully on an unlit cigar. "This is Dan Foyle, Merlini. A private op who works for Acme. Dan, tell him what you found."

"Well," Foyle said, talking around his cigar. "Lasko's an Acme client: we got him his divorce evidence. He phoned me tonight just as I was leav-

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ing the office shortly after five and asked me to be out here at eight o'clock. He said: 'I'm going to talk to someone who's threatened to kill me. Come in through the kitchen and up the back stairs to the study. And bring a gun.'

"I got here fifteen minutes ahead of time, but it wasn't soon enough. I was just crossing the lawn when I heard the first shot. I started running. Then there's another shot and I see the light in the study go out. Up here I find the door open, and inside, in the moonlight by the French window, I see the body and a man standing by it. I covered him just as he decides to take it on the lam and heads for the window. I told him to put his hands up. He jumped a foot and was so scared he nearly —"

A tall, blond man, one of the three persons Brady had ushered into the room as Foyle was speaking, said coldly, "Who wouldn't be startled? I heard shots, entered a dark room to find a body, and then turned to discover a man I'd never seen before barking at me over a gun."

"Kingsley," Gavigan said. "I'm not satisfied with your story at all. You say you were downstairs when you heard the first shot, that you ran up, heard the second shot as you reached the top of the stairs, and that no one came out through the study door before you got to it."

The novelist nodded. "That's correct. I opened the door, pushed the light switch just inside without result, and saw the overturned wheel-chair. I went across and found Lasko — dead." Kingsley looked at the private detective. "But I had no intention of leaving by the window. It was locked on the inside, and I went toward it because I heard someone outside trying to get in."

"Everybody," Gavigan growled, "tried to get in. And you want me to believe nobody ever went out — that Lasko's murderer vanished into thin air like a soap bubble. Miss Dawn, how long had you been out there on the sundeck?"

Miss Dawn's tone of voice said that she didn't like cops — not even inspectors. "Ten minutes," she said frostily. "I told you that before. And don't ask me again if anyone came out through that window. No one did. You might try asking something important. Such as where Mr. Kingsley was when he heard that first shot."

The novelist frowned. "I was in the library reading."

Miss Dawn smiled. "You never told me you could read Braille, my dear."

"Braille? I can't. Why —"

"I could see the library windows from the sundeck. They were dark. There were no lights there at all!"

"Well, Kingsley," Gavigan said. "That eliminates our invisible man. You were in here with Lasko. You're the only person who could possibly —"

Marie Lasko spoke suddenly, her voice tense and angry. "Just a minute, Inspector. Harold *was* in the library. I know. You see — I was with him."

Dorothy Dawn smiled again. "Read-

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ing aloud to you, I suppose — in the dark?"

"Don't look now, Inspector," Merlini said. "But that invisible man is back again."

"No!" Gavigan growled. "Don't give me that." He faced his three suspects. "Somebody is lying like hell. And I'm going to find out —"

"I know who's lying," Merlini said. "I'll demonstrate. Which one of you people called the police?"

It was Marie Lasko who answered. "I did. Harold told me to stay in the library, but when I heard the second shot I followed him upstairs." She indicated Foyle. "And this man told me to phone Spring 7-3100. I went down again to the library and did so."

"You see, Inspector?" Merlini said. "Together with Lasko's broken legs, that tells you who has been lying and explains the mystery of the vanishing blackmailer."

The Inspector scowled. "Oh, it does, does it?"

Who killed Jorge Lasko, the theatrical producer?

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, published monthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1946

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Managing Editor*, Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Business Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York.

2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, *in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any* other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

J. W. Ferman, *Business Manager.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 26th day of September, 1946.

[Seal] Wm. D. Clement, *Notary Public*
(My commission expires March 30, 1947.)

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Ah-h-h-h, there's good boners tonight! In your Editor's preface to Dashiell Hammett's "The Main Death" — the lead story in the September 1946 issue of EQMM — we pulled a lallapaloosa. We stated that "the first full-length study of the detective story to appear in the English language was H. Douglas Thomson's MASTERS OF MYSTERY, *published in London by Wm. Collins Sons in 1931." How we managed to put those words on typewriter paper, read them, find nothing wrong with them, send them to the printer, get proofs, read the proofs, and still find nothing wrong with them — how we committed so obvious and colossal a murder of fact is past our red-faced comprehension. Your Editor must be getting old — ah-h-h-h, there's bad memory tonight! But thank the Gods of Grue and Gore, there are plain fans and fancy aficionados all over these great United States who can spot a bloodhound boner at the drop of a clue, and who don't hesitate to write, telegraph, or telephone with sadness or glee, depending on whether the informant is friend or foe. The race was won this time by Arthur Leeds, 223 East 19th Street, New York City, who wrote us a delightful three-page, single-spaced letter containing reminiscences of Morrie Ryskind, Homer Croy, Dale Carnegie, Maxwell Smith, Fred Van Rensselaer Dey (one of the old Nick Carter syndicate), George M. Cohan, Channing Pollock, Percival Wilde, Joseph Faurot, and other titans of past and present, all incidental to reminding us that it was that grand old lady herself, Carolyn Wells, who wrote the first true full-length study of the detective story to appear in the English language.*

But it's an ill boner that bloweth no editor to good. Having been guilty of an unpardonable error, we now seize the pardonable opportunity to make amends. For your future reference (and ours) we list in order of their appearance a selected bibliography on the detective-crime story, or as it is loosely called, the mystery story. In these ten books you will find the thoughts on technique, the reflections on form, the speculations on theory, of some of the most serious students of the genre.

THE LITERATURE OF ROGUERY (1907)
by Frank Wadleigh Chandler

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE MYSTERY STORY (1913)
by Carolyn Wells

The Detective Story by R. Austin Freeman — Chapter XVI in ASPECTS OF THE MODERN SHORT STORY (1924)

MASTERS OF MYSTERY (1931)
by H. Douglas Thomson

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Detective Fiction by John Carter in NEW PATHS IN BOOK COLLECTING (1934) — published separately as COLLECTING DETECTIVE FICTION (1938)

WRITING THRILLERS FOR PROFIT (1936)
by B. Hogarth

HOW TO WRITE DETECTIVE NOVELS (1936)
by Nigel Morland

MURDER FOR PLEASURE (1941)
by Howard Haycraft

MYSTERY FICTION (1943)
by Marie F. Rodell

THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY (1946)
Edited by Howard Haycraft

The last book — THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY, *edited by Howard Haycraft — is, paradoxically, both the first and the last. It is the first modern anthology of critical essays about the mystery-crime-detective story. It rescues from biblivion those fine critical pieces that up to now have been available only in obscure and out-of-print books and periodicals. An amazingly comprehensive and definitive work of reference, it stands first in quality and importance, and last in up-to-dateness and coverage. Name a great or near-great who has written authoritatively, amusingly, or controversially about the genre, and you will find his or her best, or most biting, or most brilliant words in Howard Haycraft's superbly edited symposium.*

Which brings us, in our usual roundabout fashion, to the story at hand — Dashiell Hammett's "The Golden Horseshoe." Reprinted for the first time since it appeared originally in "Black Mask" in 1924, this story antedates most of the higher criticism referred to above. There is no doubt in your Editor's mind that every reader would achieve a deeper appreciation of Mr. Hammett's power and virtuosity if that reader first soaked in the ideas and opinions contained in the books listed above; but the sober truth remains that even if you have never read a single line of critical analysis about the detective story, you can still enjoy Mr. Hammett's story as fully as the most erudite expert. Try it and see . . .

THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

"I HAVEN'T anything very exciting to offer you this time," Vance Richmond said as we shook hands. "I want you to find a man for me — a man who is not a criminal."

There was an apology in his voice.

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The last couple of jobs this lean, grey-faced attorney had thrown my way had run to gun-play and other forms of rioting, and I suppose he thought anything less than that would put me to sleep. Was a time when he might have been right — when I was a young sprout of twenty or so, newly attached to the Continental Detective Agency. But the fifteen years that had slid by since then had dulled my appetite for rough stuff.

"The man I want found," the lawyer went on, as we sat down, "is an English architect named Norman Ashcraft. He is a man of about thirty-seven, five feet ten inches tall, well built, and fair-skinned, with light hair and blue eyes. Four years ago he was a typical specimen of the clean-cut blond Britisher. He may not be like that now — those four years have been rather hard ones for him, I imagine.

"Here is the story. Four years ago the Ashcrafts were living together in England, in Bristol. It seems that Mrs. Ashcraft is of a very jealous disposition, and he was rather high-strung. Furthermore, he had only what money he earned at his profession, while she had inherited quite a bit from her parents. Ashcraft was rather foolishly sensitive about being the husband of a wealthy woman — was inclined to go out of his way to show that he was not dependent upon her money, that he wouldn't be influenced by it. Foolish, of course, but just the sort of attitude a man of his temperament would assume. One night she accused him of paying too much attention to another woman. They quarreled, and he packed up and left.

"She was repentant within a week — especially repentant since she had learned that her suspicion had had no foundation outside of her own jealousy — and she tried to find him. But he was gone. She succeeded in tracing him from Bristol to New York, and then to Detroit, where he had been arrested and fined for disturbing the peace in a drunken row of some sort. After that he dropped out of sight until he bobbed up in Seattle ten months later." The attorney hunted through the papers on his desk and found a memorandum.

"On May 23, 1923, he shot and killed a burglar in his room in a hotel there. The Seattle police seem to have suspected that there was something funny about the shooting, but had nothing to hold Ashcraft on. The man he killed was undoubtedly a burglar. Then Ashcraft disappeared again, and nothing was heard of him until just about a year ago. Mrs. Ashcraft had advertisements inserted in the personal columns of papers in the principal American cities.

"One day she received a letter from him, from San Francisco. It was a very formal letter, and simply requested her to stop advertising. Although he was through with the name Norman Ashcraft, he wrote, he disliked seeing it published in every newspaper he read.

"She mailed a letter to him at the General Delivery window here, and

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used another advertisement to tell him about it. He answered it, rather caustically. She wrote him again, asking him to come home. He refused, though he seemed less bitter toward her. They exchanged several letters, and she learned that he had become a drug addict, and what was left of his pride would not let him return to her until he looked — and was at least somewhat like — his former self. She persuaded him to accept enough money from her to straighten himself out. She sent him this money each month, in care of General Delivery, here.

"Meanwhile she closed up her affairs in England — she had no close relatives to hold her there — and came to San Francisco, to be on hand when her husband was ready to return to her. A year has gone. She still sends him money each month. She still waits for him to come back to her. He has repeatedly refused to see her, and his letters are evasive — filled with accounts of the struggle he is having, making headway against the drug one month, slipping back the next.

"She suspects by now, of course, that he has no intention of ever coming back to her; that he does not intend giving up the drug; that he is simply using her as a source of income. I have urged her to discontinue the monthly allowance for a while. But she will not do that. You see, she blames herself for his present condition. She thinks her foolish flare of jealousy is responsible for his plight, and she is afraid to do anything that might either hurt him or induce him to hurt himself further. Her mind is unchangeably made up in that respect. She wants him back, wants him straightened out; but if he will not come, then she is content to continue the payments for the rest of his life. But she wants to know what she is to expect. She wants to end this devilish uncertainty in which she has been living.

"What we want, then, is for you to find Ashcraft. We want to know whether there is any likelihood of his ever becoming a man again, or whether he is gone beyond redemption. There is your job. Find him, learn whatever you can about him, and then, after we know something, we will decide whether it is wiser to force an interview between them — in hopes that she will be able to influence him — or not."

"I'll try it," I said. "When does Mrs. Ashcraft send him his monthly allowance?"

"On the first of each month."

"Today is the twenty-eighth. That'll give me three days to wind up a job I have on hand. Got a photo of him?"

"Unfortunately, no. In her anger immediately after their row, Mrs. Ashcraft destroyed everything she had that would remind her of him."

I got up and reached for my hat.

"See you around the second of the month," I said, as I left the office.

On the afternoon of the first, I went down to the post office and got hold of Lusk, the inspector in charge of the division at the time.

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"I've got a line on a scratcher from up north," I told Lusk, "who is supposed to be getting his mail at the window. Will you fix it up so I can get a spot on him?"

Post office inspectors are all tied up with rules and regulations that forbid their giving assistance to private detectives except on certain criminal matters. But a friendly inspector doesn't have to put you through the third degree. You lie to him — so that he will have an alibi in case there's a kick-back — and whether he thinks you're lying or not doesn't matter.

So presently I was downstairs again, loitering within sight of the A to D window, with the clerk at the window instructed to give me the office when Ashcraft's mail was called for. There was no mail for him there at the time. Mrs. Ashcraft's letter would hardly get to the clerks that afternoon, but I was taking no chances. I stayed on the job until the windows closed.

At a few minutes after ten the next morning I got my action. One of the clerks gave me the signal. A small man in a blue suit and a soft gray hat was walking away from the window with an envelope in his hand. A man of perhaps forty years, though he looked older. His face was pasty, his feet dragged, and his clothes needed brushing and pressing.

He came straight to the desk in front of which I stood fiddling with some papers. He took a large envelope from his pocket, and I got just enough of a glimpse of its front to see that it was already stamped and addressed. He kept the addressed side against his body, put the letter he had got from the window in it, and licked the flap backward, so that there was no possible way for anybody to see the front of the envelope. Then he rubbed the flap down carefully and turned toward the mailing slots. I went after him. There was nothing to do but to pull the always reliable stumble.

I overtook him, stepped close and faked a fall on the marble floor, bumping into him, grabbing him as if to regain my balance. It went rotten. In the middle of my stunt my foot really did slip, and we went down on the floor like a pair of wrestlers.

I scrambled up, yanked him to his feet, mumbled an apology and almost had to push him out of the way to beat him to the envelope that lay face down on the floor. I had to turn it over as I handed it to him in order to get the address:

Mr. Edward Bohannon,
Golden Horseshoe Café,
Tijuana, Baja California,
Mexico.

I had the address, but I had tipped my mitt. There was no way in God's world for this little man in blue to miss knowing that I had been trying to get that address.

I dusted myself off while he put his envelope through a slot. He didn't come back past me, but went on down toward the Mission Street exit. I couldn't let him get away with what he knew. I didn't want Ashcraft tipped off before I got to him. I would

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have to try another trick as ancient as the one the slippery floor had bungled for me. I set out after the little man again.

Just as I reached his side he turned his head to see if he was being followed.

"Hello, Micky!" I hailed him. "How's everything in Chi?"

"You got me wrong." He spoke out of the side of his gray-lipped mouth, not stopping. "I don't know nothin' about Chi."

His eyes were pale blue, with needle-point pupils — the eyes of a heroin or morphine user.

"Quit stalling." I said. "You fell off the rattler only this morning."

He stopped on the sidewalk and faced me.

"Me? Who do you think I am?"

"You're Micky Parker. The Dutchman gave us the rap that you were headed here.

"You're cuckoo," he sneered. "I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about!"

That was nothing — neither did I. I raised my right hand in my overcoat pocket.

"Now I'll tell one," I growled.

He flinched away from my bulging pocket.

"Hey, listen, brother!" he begged. "You got me wrong — on the level. My name ain't Micky Parker, an' I been here in Frisco for a solid year."

"You got to show me."

"I can do it," he exclaimed, all eagerness. "You come down the drag with me, an' I'll show you. My name's Ryan, an' I been livin' aroun' the corner here on Sixth Street.

"Ryan?" I asked.

"Yes — John Ryan."

I chalked that up against him. I don't suppose there are three old-time yeggs in the country who haven't used the name at least once; it's the John Smith of yeggdom.

This particular John Ryan led me around to a house on Sixth Street, where the landlady — a rough-hewn woman of fifty, with bare arms that were haired and muscled like the village smithy's — assured me that her tenant had to her positive knowledge been in San Francisco for months, and that she remembered seeing him at least once a day for a couple of weeks back. If I had been really suspicious that this Ryan was my mythical Micky Parker from Chicago, I wouldn't have taken the woman's word for it, but as it was I pretended to be satisfied.

That seemed to be all right then. Mr. Ryan had been led astray, had been convinced that I had mistaken him for another crook, and that I was not interested in the Ashcraft letter. I would be safe — reasonably safe — in letting the situation go as it stood. But loose ends worry me. This bird was a hop-head, and he had given me a phony-sounding name, so . . .

"What do you do for a living?" I asked him.

"I ain't been doin' nothin' for a coupla months," he pattered, "but I expec' to open a lunch room with a fella nex' week."

"Let's go up to your room," I suggested. "I want to talk to you."

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He wasn't enthusiastic, but he took me up. He had two rooms and a kitchen on the third floor. They were dirty, foul-smelling rooms.

"Where's Ashcraft?" I threw at him.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he mumbled.

"You'd better figure it out," I advised him, "or there's a nice cool cell down in the booby-hatch that will be wrapped around you."

"You ain't got nothin' on me."

"What of that? How'd you like to do a thirty or a sixty on a vag charge?"

"Vag, hell!" he snarled. "I got five hundred smacks in my kick."

I grinned at him.

"You know better than that, Ryan. A pocketful of money'll get you nothing in California. You've got no job. You can't show where your money comes from. You're made to order for the vag law."

I had this bird figured as a dope peddlar. If he was — or was anything else off color that might come to light when he was vagged — the chances were that he would be willing to sell Ashcraft out to save himself; especially since, so far as I knew, Ashcraft wasn't on the wrong side of the criminal law.

"If I were you," I went on while he stared at the floor and thought, "I'd be a nice, obliging fellow and do my talking now. You're —"

He twisted sidewise in his chair and one of his hands went behind him.

I kicked him out of his chair.

The table slipped under me or I would have stretched him. As it was, that foot that I aimed at his jaw took him on the chest and carried him over backward, with the rocking-chair piled on top of him. I pulled the chair off and took his gun — a cheap nickle-plated .32. Then I went back to my seat on the corner of the table.

He had only that one flash of fight in him. He got up sniveling.

"I'll tell you. I don't want no trouble. This Ashcraft told me he was jus' stringin' his wife along. He give me ten bucks a throw to get his letter ever' month an' send it to him in Tijuana. I knowed him here, an' when he went south six months ago — he's got a girl down there — I promised I'd do it for him. I knowed it was money — he said it was his 'alimony' — but I didn't know there was nothin' wrong."

"What sort of a hombre is this Ashcraft? What's his graft?"

"I don't know. He could be a con man — he's got a good front. He's a Englishman, an' mostly goes by the name of Ed Bohannon. He hits the hop. I don't use it myself" — that was a good one — "but you know how it is in a burg like this, a man runs into all kinds of people. I don't know nothin' about what he's up to."

That was all I could get out of him. He couldn't — or wouldn't — tell me where Ashcraft had lived in San Francisco or who he had mobbed up with.

Ryan squawked his head off when he found that I was going to vag him anyway.

"You said you'd spring me if I

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talked," he wailed.

"I did not. But if I had — when a gent flashes a rod on me I figure it cancels any agreement we might have had. Come on."

I couldn't afford to let him run around loose until I got in touch with Ashcraft. He would have been sending a telegram before I was three blocks away, and my quarry would be on his merry way to points north, east, south and west.

It was a good hunch I played in nabbing Ryan. When he was fingerprinted at the Hall of Justice he turned out to be one Fred Rooney, alias "Jamocha," a pedlar and smuggler who had crushed out of the Federal Prison at Leavenworth, leaving eight years of a tenner still unserved.

"Will you sew him up for a couple of days?" I asked the captain of the city jail. "I've got work to do that will go smoother if he can't get any word out for a while."

"Sure," the captain promised. "The federal people won't take him off our hands for two or three days. I'll keep him air-tight till then."

From the jail I went up to Vance Richmond's office and turned my news over to him.

"Ashcraft is getting his mail in Tijuana. He's living down there under the name of Ed Bohannon, and maybe has a woman there. I've just thrown one of his friends — the one who handled the mail and an escaped con — in the cooler."

The attorney reached for the telephone.

He called a number. "Is Mrs. Ashcraft there? . . . This is Mr. Richmond. . . . No, we haven't exactly found him, but I think we know where he is. . . . Yes. . . . In about fifteen minutes."

He put down the telephone and stood up.

"We'll run up to Mrs. Ashcraft's house and see her."

Fifteen minutes later we were getting out of Richmond's car in Jackson Street near Gough. The house was a three-story white stone building, set behind a carefully sodded little lawn with an iron railing around it.

Mrs. Ashcraft received us in a drawing-room on the second floor. A tall woman of less than thirty, slimly beautiful in a gray dress. Clear was the word that best fits her; it described the blue of her eyes, the pink-white of her skin, and the light brown of her hair.

Richmond introduced me to her, and then I told her what I had learned, omitting the part about the woman in Tijuana. Nor did I tell her that the chances were her husband was a crook nowadays.

"Mr. Ashcraft is in Tijuana, I have been told. He left San Francisco six months ago. His mail is being forwarded to him in care of a café there, under the name of Edward Bohannon."

Her eyes lighted up happily, but she didn't throw a fit. She wasn't that sort. She addressed the attorney:

"Shall I go down? Or will you?"

Richmond shook his head.

"Neither. You certainly shouldn't

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go, and I cannot — not at present." He turned to me. "You'll have to go. You can no doubt handle it better than I could. You will know what to do and how to do it. Mrs. Ashcraft doesn't wish to force herself on him, but neither does she wish to leave anything undone that might help him."

Mrs. Ashcraft held a strong, slender hand out to me.

"You will do whatever you think wisest."

It was partly a question, partly an expression of confidence.

"I will," I promised.

I liked this Mrs. Ashcraft.

Tijuana hadn't changed much in the two years I had been away. Still the same six or seven hundred feet of dusty and dingy street running between two almost solid rows of saloons, with dirtier side streets taking care of the dives that couldn't find room on the main street.

The automobile that had brought me down from San Diego dumped me into the center of the town early in the afternoon, and the day's business was just getting under way. That is, there were only two or three drunks wandering around among the dogs and loafing Mexicans in the street, although there was already a bustle of potential drunks moving from one saloon to the next.

In the middle of the next block I saw a big gilded horseshoe. I went down the street and into the saloon behind the sign. It was a fair sample of the local joint. A bar on your left as you came in, running half the length of the building, with three or four slot machines on one end. Across from the bar, against the right-hand wall, a dance floor that ran from the front wall to a raised platform, where a greasy orchestra was now preparing to go to work. Behind the orchestra was a row of low stalls or booths, with open fronts and a table and two benches apiece.

It was early in the day, and there were only a few buyers present. I caught a bartender's eye. He was a beefy, red-faced Irishman, with sorrel hair plastered down in two curls that hid what little forehead he had.

"I want to see Ed Bohannon," I told him confidentially.

He turned blank eyes on me.

"I don't know no Ed Bohannon."

Taking out a piece of paper and a pencil I scribbled, *Jamocha is copped*, and slid the paper over to him.

"If a man who says he's Ed Bohannon asks for that, will you give it to him?"

"I guess so."

"Good," I said. "I'll hang around a while."

I walked down the room and sat at a table in one of the stalls. A lanky girl who had done something to her hair that made it purple was camped beside me before I had settled in my seat.

"Buy me a little drink?" she asked.

The face she made at me was probably meant for a smile. Whatever it was, it beat me. I was afraid she'd do it again, so I surrendered.

"Yes," I said, and ordered a bottle

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of beer for myself from the waiter who was already hanging over my shoulder.

The purple-haired woman at my side downed her shot of whiskey, and was opening her mouth to suggest that we have another drink, — hustlers down there don't waste any time at all — when a voice spoke from behind me.

"Cora, Frank wants you."

Cora scowled, looking over my shoulder.

Then she made that damned face at me again, said "All right, Kewpie. Will you take care of my friend here?" and left me.

Kewpie slid into the seat beside me. She was a little chunky girl of perhaps eighteen — not a day more than that. Just a kid. Her short hair was brown and curly over a round, boyish face with laughing, impudent eyes.

I bought her a drink and got another bottle of beer.

"What's on your mind?" I asked.

"Hooch." She grinned at me — a grin that was as boyish as the straight look of her brown eyes. "Gallons of it."

"And besides that?"

I knew this switching of girls on me hadn't been purposeless.

"I hear you're looking for a friend of mine," Kewpie said.

"That might be. What friends have you got?"

"Well, there's Ed Bohannon for one. You know Ed?"

"No — not yet."

"But you're looking for him?"

"Uh-huh."

"What's the racket? Maybe I could get word to Ed."

"Let it go," I bluffed. "This Ed of yours seems to be as exclusive as all hell. Well, it's no skin off *my* face. I'll buy you another drink and trot along."

She jumped up.

"Wait a minute. I'll see if I can get him. What's your name?"

"Parker will do as well as any other," I said, the name I had used on Ryan popping first into my mind.

"You wait," she called back as she moved toward the back door. "I think I can find him."

"I think so too," I agreed.

Ten minutes went by, and a man came to my table from the front of the establishment. He was a blond Englishman of less than forty, with all the marks of the gentleman gone to pot on him. Not altogether on the rocks yet, but you could see evidence of the down-hill slide plainly in the dullness of his blue eyes, in the pouches under his eyes, in the blurred lines around his mouth and the mouth's looseness, and in the grayish tint of his skin. He was still fairly attractive in appearance — enough of his former wholesomeness remained for that.

He sat down facing me.

"You're looking for me?"

"You're Ed Bohannon?"

He nodded.

"Jamocha was picked up a couple of days ago," I told him, "and ought to be riding back to the Kansas big house by now. He got word out for me to give you the rap. He knew I was heading this way."

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He frowned at the table. Then he looked sharply at me again.

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"*He* didn't tell me anything. He got word out to me by somebody's mouthpiece. I didn't see him."

"You're staying down here a while?"

"Yes, for two or three days," I said. "I've got something on the fire."

He smiled, and held out his hand.

"Thanks for the tip, Parker," he said. "If you'll take a walk with me I'll give you something real to drink."

I didn't have anything against that. He led me out of the Golden Horseshoe and down a side street to an adobe house set out where the town fringed off into the desert. In the front room he waved me to a chair and went into the next room.

"What do you fancy?" he called through the door. "Rye, gin, Scotch —"

"The last one wins," I interrupted his catalog.

He brought in a bottle of Black and White, a siphon and some glasses, and we settled down to drinking. We drank and talked, drank and talked, and each of us pretended to be drunker than he really was — though before long we were both as full as a pair of goats.

It was a drinking contest pure and simple. He was trying to drink me into a pulp — a pulp that would easily give up all of its secrets — and I was trying the same game on him. Neither of us made much progress.

"Y'know," he was saying somewhere along toward dark, "I've been a damn' ass. Got a wife — the nicesh woman in the worl'. Wantsh me t' come back to her, an' all tha' short of thing. Yet I hang around here, lappin' up this shtuff — hittin' the pipe — when I could be shomebody. Arc — architec', y' un'ershtand — good one, too. But I got in rut — got mixsh up with theshe people. C-can't sheem to break 'way. Goin' to, though — no spoofin'. Goin' back to li'l wife, nicesh woman in the worl'. Breakin' 'way from p-pipe an' ever'thing. Look at me. D' I look like a hop-head? Course not! Curin' m'self, tha's why. I'll show you — take a smoke now — show you I can take it or leave it alone."

Pulling himself dizzily up out of his chair, he wandered into the next room, and came staggering back into the room again carrying an elaborate opium layout — all silver and ebony — on a silver tray. He put it on the table and flourished a pipe at me.

"Have a li 'l rear on me, Parker."

I told him I'd stick to the Scotch.

"Give y' shot of C. 'f y'd rather have it," he invited me.

I declined the cocaine, so he sprawled himself comfortably on the floor beside the table, rolled and cooked a pill, and our party went on — with him smoking his hop and me punishing the liquor — each of us still talking for the other's benefit, and trying to get the other to talk for our own.

I was holding down a lovely package by the time Kewpie came in, at midnight.

"Looks like you folks are enjoying yourselves," she laughed, leaning down

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to kiss the Englishman's rumpled hair.

She perched herself on the table and reached for the Scotch.

"Everything's lovely," I assured her, though probably I didn't say it that clear.

"You ought to stay oiled all the time, Shorty; it improves you."

I don't know whether I made any answer to that or not. Shortly afterward, I know, I spread myself beside the Englishman on the floor and went to sleep.

The next two days were pretty much like the first one. Ashcraft and I were together twenty-four hours each of the days, and usually the girl was with us, and the only time we weren't drinking was when we were sleeping off what we had been drinking. We spent most of those three days in either the adobe house or the Golden Horseshoe, but we found time to take in most of the other joints in town now and then. I had only a hazy idea of some of the things that went on around me, though I don't think I missed anything entirely.

Ashcraft and I were as thick as thieves, on the surface, but neither of us ever lost his distrust of the other, no matter how drunk we got — and we got plenty drunk. He went up against his mud-pipe regularly. I don't think the girl used the stuff, but she had a pretty capacity for hard liquor.

Three days of this, and then, sobering up, I was riding back to San Francisco, making a list of what I knew and guessed about Norman Ashcraft, alias Ed Bohannon.

The list went something like this:

(1) He suspected, if he didn't know, that I had come down to see him on his wife's account: he had been too smooth and had entertained me too well for me to doubt that; (2) he apparently had decided to return to his wife, though there was no guarantee that he would actually do so; (3) he was not incurably addicted to drugs; (4) he might pull himself together under his wife's influence, but it was doubtful: physically he hadn't gone to the dogs, but he had had his taste of the gutter and seemed to like it; (5) the girl Kewpie was crazily in love with him, while he liked her, but wasn't turning himself inside out over her.

A good night's sleep on the train between Los Angeles and San Francisco set me down in the Third and Townsend Street station with nearly normal head and stomach and not too many kinks in my nerves. I put away a breakfast of more food than I had eaten in three days, and went up to Vance Richmond's office.

"Mr. Richmond is in Eureka," his stenographer told me.

"Can you get him on the phone?"

She could, and did.

Without mentioning any names, I told the attorney what I knew and guessed.

"I see," he said. "Suppose you go out to Mrs. A's house and tell her. I will write her tonight, and I probably shall be back in the city by the day after tomorrow. I think we can safely

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delay action until then."

I caught a street car, transferred at Van Ness Avenue, and went out to Mrs. Ashcraft's house. Nothing happened when I rang the bell. I rang it several times before I noticed that there were two morning newspapers in the vestibule. I looked at the dates — this morning's and yesterday morning's.

An old man in faded overalls was watering the lawn next door.

"Do you know if the people who live here have gone away?" I called.

"I don't guess so. The back door's open, I seen this mornin'."

He stopped to scratch his chin.

"They may of gone," he said slowly. "Come to think on it, I ain't seen any of 'em for — I don't remember seein' any of 'em yesterday."

I left the front steps and went around the house, climbed the low fence in back and went up the back steps. The kitchen door stood about a foot open. Nobody was visible in the kitchen, but there was a sound of running water.

I knocked on the door with my knuckles, loudly. There was no answering sound. I pushed the door open and went in. The sound of water came from the sink. I looked in the sink.

Under a thin stream of water running from one of the faucets lay a carving knife with nearly a foot of keen blade. The knife was clean, but the back of the porcelain sink — where water had splashed with only small, scattered drops — was freckled with red-brown spots. I scraped one of them with a finger-nail — dried blood.

Except for the sink, I could see nothing out of order in the kitchen. I opened a pantry door. Everything seemed all right there. Across the room another door led to the front of the house. I opened the door and went into a passageway. Not enough light came from the kitchen to illuminate the passageway. I fumbled in the dusk for the light-button that I knew should be there. I stepped on something soft.

Pulling my foot back, I felt in my pocket for matches, and struck one. In front of me, his head and shoulders on the floor, his hips and legs on the lower steps of a flight of stairs, lay a Filipino boy in his underclothes.

He was dead. One eye was cut, and his throat was gashed straight across, close up under his chin. I could see the killing without even shutting my eyes. At the top of the stairs — the killer's left hand dashing into the Filipino's face — thumb-nail gouging into eye — pushing the brown face back — tightening the brown throat for the knife's edge — the slash — and the shove down the steps.

The light from my second match showed me the button. I clicked on the lights, buttoned my coat, and went up the steps. Dried blood darkened them here and there, and at the second-floor landing the wall paper was stained with a big blot. At the head of the stairs I found another light-button, and pressed it.

I walked down the hall, poked my head into two rooms that seemed in

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order, and then turned a corner — and pulled up with a jerk, barely in time to miss stumbling over a woman who lay there.

She was bunched on the floor, face down, with knees drawn up under her and both hands clasped to her stomach. She wore a nightgown, and her hair was in a braid down her back.

I put a finger on the back of her neck. Stone-cold.

Kneeling on the floor — to avoid the necessity of turning her over — I looked at her face. She was the maid who had admitted Richmond and me four days ago.

I stood up again and looked around. The maid's head was almost touching a closed door. I stepped around her and pushed the door open. A bedroom, and not the maid's. It was an expensively dainty bedroom in cream and gray, with French prints on the walls. Nothing in the room was disarranged except the bed. The bed clothes were rumpled and tangled, and piled high in the center of the bed — in a pile that was too large. . . .

Leaning over the bed, I began to draw the covers off. The second piece came away stained with blood. I yanked the rest off.

Mrs. Ashcraft was dead there.

Her body was drawn up in a little heap, from which her head hung crookedly, dangling from a neck that had been cut clean through to the bone. Her face was marked with four deep scratches from temple to chin. One sleeve had been torn from the jacket of her blue silk pajamas. Bedding and pajamas were soggy with the blood that the clothing piled over her had kept from drying.

I put the blanket over her again, edged past the dead woman in the hall, and went down the front stairs, switching on more lights, hunting for the telephone. Near the foot of the stairs I found it. I called the police detective bureau first, and then Vance Richmond's office.

"Get word to Mr. Richmond that Mrs. Ashcraft has been murdered," I told his stenographer. "I'm at her house, and he can get in touch with me here.

Then I went out of the front door and sat on the top step, smoking a cigarette while I waited for the police.

I felt rotten. I've seen dead people in larger quantities than three in my time, but this thing had fallen on me while my nerves were ragged from three days of boozing.

The police automobile swung around the corner and began disgorging men before I had finished my first cigarette. O'Gar, the detective sergeant in charge of the Homicide Detail, was the first man up the steps.

"Hullo," he greeted me. "What have you got hold of this time?"

"I found three bodies in there before I quit looking," I told him as I led him indoors. "Maybe a regular detective like you can find more."

"You didn't do bad — for a lad," he said.

My wooziness had passed. I was eager to get to work.

I showed the Filipino to O'Gar

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first, and then the two women. We didn't find any more. Detail work occupied all of us — O'Gar, the eight men under him, and me — for the next few hours. The house had to be gone over from roof to cellar. The neighbors had to be grilled. The employment agencies through which the servants had been hired had to be examined. Relatives and friends of the Filipino and the maid had to be traced and questioned. Newsboys, mail carriers, grocers' delivery men, laundrymen, had to be found, questioned and investigated.

When the bulk of the reports were in, O'Gar and I sneaked away from the others and locked ourselves in the library.

"Night before last, huh? Wednesday night?" O'Gar grunted when we were comfortable in a couple of leather chairs, burning tobacco.

I nodded. The report of the doctor who had examined the bodies, the presence of the two newspapers in the vestibule, and the fact that neither neighbor, grocer nor butcher had seen any of them since Wednesday, combined to make Wednesday night — or early Thursday morning — the correct date.

"I'd say the killer cracked the back door," O'Gar went on, staring at the ceiling through smoke, "picked up the carving knife in the kitchen, and went upstairs. Maybe he went straight to Mrs. Ashcraft's room — maybe not. But after a bit he went in there. The torn sleeve and the scratches on her face mean that there was a tussle. The Filipino and the maid heard the noise — heard her scream maybe — and rushed to her room to find out what was the matter. The maid most likely got there just as the killer was coming out — and got hers. I guess the Filipino saw him then and ran. The killer caught him at the head of the back stairs — and finished him. Then he went down to the kitchen, washed his hands, dropped the knife, and blew."

"So far, so good," I agreed; "but I notice you skip over the question of who he was and why he killed."

"Don't crowd me," he rumbled; "I'll get around to that. There seem to be just three guesses to take your pick from. The killer was either a maniac who did the job for the fun of it, a burglar who was discovered and ran wild, or somebody who had a reason for bumping off Mrs. Ashcraft, and then had to kill the two servants when they discovered him. My personal guess is that the job was done by somebody who wanted to wipe out Mrs. Ashcraft."

"Not so bad," I applauded. "Now listen to this: Mrs. Ashcraft has a husband in Tijuana, a mild sort of hophead who is mixed up with a bunch of thugs. She was trying to persuade him to come back to her. He has a girl down there who is young, goofy over him, and a bad actor — one tough youngster. He was planning to run out on the girl and come back home."

"So-o-o?" O'Gar said softly.

"But," I continued, "I was with both him and the girl, in Tijuana,

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night before last — when this killing was done."

"So-o?"

A knock on the door interrupted our talk. It was a policeman to tell me that I was wanted on the phone. I went down to the first floor, and Vance Richmond's voice came over the wire.

"What is it? Miss Henry delivered your message, but she couldn't give me any details."

I told him the whole thing.

"I'll leave for the city tonight," he said when I had finished. "You go ahead and do whatever you want. You're to have a free hand."

"Right," I replied. "I'll probably be out of town when you get back. You can reach me through the Agency. I'm going to wire Ashcraft to come up — in your name."

After Richmond had hung up, I called the city jail and asked the captain if John Ryan, alias Fred Rooney, alias Jamocha, was still there.

"No. Federal officers left for Leavenworth with him yesterday morning."

Up in the library again, I told O'Gar hurriedly:

"I'm catching the evening train south, betting my marbles that the job was made in Tijuana. I'm wiring Ashcraft to come up. I want to get him away from the Mexican town for a day or two, and if he's up here you can keep an eye on him. I'll give you a description of him, and you can pick him up at Vance Richmond's office."

Half an hour of the little time I had left I spent writing and sending three telegrams. The first was to Ashcraft.

EDWARD BOHANNON,
GOLDEN HORSESHOE CAFE,
TIJUANA, MEXICO.

MRS. ASHCRAFT IS DEAD. CAN YOU COME IMMEDIATELY?

VANCE RICHMOND

The other two were in code. One went to the Continental Detective Agency's Kansas City branch, asking that an operative be sent to Leavenworth to question Jamocha. The other requested the Los Angeles branch to have a man meet me in San Diego the next day.

Then I dashed out to my rooms for a bagful of clean clothes, and went to sleep riding south again.

San Diego was gay and packed when I got off the train early the next afternoon — filled with the crowd that the first Saturday of the racing season across the border had drawn. Movie folk from Los Angeles, farmers from the Imperial Valley, sailors from the Pacific Fleet, gablers, tourists, grifters, and even regular people, from everywhere. I lunched, registered and left my bag at a hotel, and went up to the U. S. Grant Hotel to pick up the Los Angeles operative I had wired for.

I found him in the lobby — a freckle-faced youngster of twenty-two or so, whose bright gray eyes were busy just now with a racing program, which he held in a hand that had a finger bandaged with adhesive tape. I passed him and stopped at the cigar stand, where I bought a package of

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cigarettes and straightened out an imaginary dent in my hat. Then I went out to the street again. The bandaged finger and the business with the hat were our introductions. Somebody invented those tricks back before the Civil War, but they still worked smoothly, so their antiquity was no reason for discarding them.

I strolled up Fourth Street, getting away from Broadway — San Diego's main stem — and the operative caught up with me. His name was Gorman, and I gave him the lay.

"You're to go down to Tijuana and take a plant on the Golden Horseshoe Café. There's a little chunk of a girl hustling drinks in there — short, curly brown hair; brown eyes; round face; rather large red mouth; square shoulders. You can't miss her; she's a nice-looking kid of about eighteen, called Kewpie. She's the target for your eye. Keep away from her. Don't try to rope her. I'll give you an hour's start. Then I'm coming down to talk to her. I want to know what she does right after I leave, and what she does for the next few days. You can get in touch with me at the" — I gave him the name of my hotel and my room number — "each night. Don't give me a tumble anywhere else."

We parted, and I went down to the plaza and sat on a bench for an hour. Then I went up to the corner and fought for a seat on a Tijuana stage.

Fifteen or more miles of dusty riding — packed five in a seat meant for three — a momentary halt at the Immigration Station on the line, and I was climbing out of the stage at the entrance to the race track. The ponies had been running for some time, but the turnstiles were still spinning a steady stream of customers into the track. I turned my back on the gate and went over to the row of jitneys in front of the Monte Carlo — the big wooden casino — got into one, and was driven over to the Old Town.

The Old Town had a deserted look. Nearly everybody was over watching the dogs do their stuff. Gorman's freckled face showed over a drink of mescal when I entered the Golden Horseshoe. I hoped he had a good constitution. He needed one if he was going to do his sleuthing on a distilled cactus diet.

The welcome I got from the Horseshoers was just like a homecoming. Even the bartender with the plastered-down curls gave me a grin.

"Where's Kewpie?" I asked.

"Brother-in-lawing Ed?" a big Swede girl leered at me. "I'll see if I can find her for you."

Kewpie came through the back door just then and climbed all over me, hugging me, rubbing her face against mine, and the Lord knows what all. "Down for another souse?"

"No," I said, leading her back toward the stalls. "Business this time. Where's Ed?"

"Up north. His wife kicked off and he's gone to collect the remains."

"That makes you sorry?"

"You bet! It's tough on me that papa has come into a lot of sugar."

I looked at her out of the corner of

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my eyes — a glance that was supposed to be wise.

"And you think Ed's going to bring the jack back to you?"

Her eyes snapped darkly at me.

"What's eating you?" she demanded.

I smiled knowingly.

"One of two things is going to happen," I predicted. "Ed's going to ditch you — he was figuring on that, anyway — or he's going to need every brownie he can scrape up to keep his neck from being —"

"You God-damned liar!"

Her right shoulder was to me, touching my left. Her left hand flashed down under her short skirt. I pushed her shoulder forward, twisting her body sharply away from me. The knife her left hand had whipped up from her leg jabbed deep into the underside of the table. A thick-bladed knife, balanced for accurate throwing.

She kicked backward, driving one of her sharp heels into my ankle. I slid my left arm around behind her and pinned her elbow to her side just as she freed the knife from the table.

"What th' hell's all 'is?"

I looked up.

Across the table a man stood glaring at me — legs apart, fists on hips. A tall, raw-boned man with wide shoulders, out of which a long, skinny, yellow neck rose to support a little round head. His eyes were black shoe-buttons stuck close together at the top of a little mashed nose.

"Where d' yuh get 'at stuff?" this lovely person roared at me.

He was too tough to reason with.

"If you're a waiter," I told him, "bring me a bottle of beer and something for the kid. If you're not a waiter — sneak."

"I'll bring yuh a —"

The girl wriggled out of my hands and shut him up.

"Mine's liquor," she said sharply.

He snarled, looked from one of us to the other, showed me his dirty teeth again, and wandered away.

"Who's your friend?"

"You'll do well to lay off him," she advised me, not answering my question.

Then she slid her knife back in its hiding place under her skirt and twisted around to face me.

"Now what's all this about Ed being in trouble?"

"You read about the killing in the papers?"

"Yes."

"You oughtn't need a map, then," I said. "Ed's only out is to put the job on you. But I doubt if he can get away with that. If he can't, he's nailed."

"You're crazy!" she exclaimed. "You weren't too drunk to know that both of us were here with you when the killing was done."

"I'm not crazy enough to think that proves anything," I corrected her. "But I am crazy enough to expect to go back to San Francisco wearing the killer on my wrist."

She laughed at me. I laughed back and stood up.

"See you some more," I said as I

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strolled toward the door.

I returned to San Diego and sent a wire to Los Angeles, asking for another operative. Then I got something to eat and spent the evening in my hotel room waiting for Gorman.

It was late when he arrived, and he smelled of mescal from San Diego to St. Louis and back, but his head seemed level enough.

"Looked like I was going to have to shoot you loose from the place for a moment," he grinned.

"You let me alone," I ordered. "Your job is to see what goes on, and that's all. What did you turn up?"

"After you blew, the girl and the big guy put their noodles together. They seemed kind of agitated — all agog, you might say. He slid out, so I dropped the girl and slid along behind him. He came to town and got a wire off. I couldn't crowd him close enough to see who it was to. Then he went back to the joint."

"Who is the big guy?"

"He's no sweet dream, from what I hear. 'Gooseneck' Flinn is the name on his calling cards. He's bouncer and general utility man for the joint."

So this Gooseneck party was the Golden Horseshoe's clean-up man, and he hadn't been in sight during my three-day spree? I couldn't possibly have been so drunk that I'd forget his ugliness. And it had been on one of those three days that Mrs. Ashcraft and her servants had been killed.

"I wired your office for another op," I told Gorman. "He's to connect with you. Turn the girl over to him, and you camp on Gooseneck's trail. I think we're going to hang three killings on him, so watch your step."

"Aye, aye, Cap," and he went off to get some sleep.

The next afternoon I spent at the race track, fooling around with the bangtails while I waited for night.

After the last race, I got something to eat at the Sunset Inn, and then drifted over to the big casino — the other end of the same building. A thousand or more people of all sorts were jostling one another there, fighting to go up against poker, craps, chuck-a-luck, wheels of fortune, roulette and twenty-one with whatever money the race track had left or given them. I didn't buck any of the games. My playtime was over. I walked around through the crowd looking for my men.

I spotted the first one — a sunburned man who was plainly a farm hand in his Sunday clothes. He was pushing toward the door, and his face held that peculiar emptiness which belongs to the gambler who has gone broke before the end of the game. It's a look of regret that is not so much for the loss of the money as for the necessity of quitting.

I got between the farm hand and the door.

"Clean you?" I asked sympathetically when he reached me.

A sheepish sort of nod.

"How'd you like to pick up five bucks for a few minutes' work?" I tempted him.

He would like it, but what was the

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work?

"I want you to go over to the Old Town with me and look at a man. Then you get your pay. There are no strings to it."

That didn't exactly satisfy him, but five bucks are five bucks; and he could drop out any time he didn't like the looks of things. He decided to try it.

I put the farm hand over by a door, and went after another — a little, plump man with round, optimistic eyes and a weak mouth. He was willing to earn five dollars in the simple and easy manner I had outlined. The next man I braced was a little too timid to take a chance on a blind game. Then I got a Filipino — glorious in a fawn-colored suit, and a stocky young Greek who was probably either a waiter or a barber.

Four men were enough. My quartet pleased me immensely. They didn't look too intelligent for my purpose, and they didn't look like thugs or sharpers. I put them in a jitney and took them over to the Old Town.

"Now this is it," I coached them when we had arrived. "I'm going into the Golden Horseshoe Café, around the corner. Give me two or three minutes, and then come in and buy yourselves a drink." I gave the farm hand a five-dollar bill. "You pay for the drinks with that — it isn't part of your wages. There's a tall, broad-shouldered man with a long, yellow neck and a small ugly face in there. You can't miss him. I want you all to take a good look at him without letting him get wise. When you're sure you'd know him again anywhere, give me the nod, and come back here and you get your money. Be careful when you give me the nod. I don't want anybody in there to find out that you know me."

It sounded queer to them, but there was the promise of five dollars apiece, and there were the games back in the casino, where five dollars might buy a man into a streak of luck that — write the rest of it yourself. They asked questions, which I refused to answer, but they stuck.

Gooseneck was behind the bar, helping out the bartenders, when I entered the place. They needed help. The joint bulged with customers.

I couldn't find Gorman's freckled face in the crowd, but I picked out the hatchet-sharp white face of Hooper, another Los Angeles operative, who, I knew then, had been sent down in response to my second telegram. Kewpie was farther down the bar, drinking with a little man whose meek face had the devil-may-care expression of a model husband on a tear. She nodded at me, but didn't leave her client.

Gooseneck gave me a scowl and the bottle of beer I had ordered. Presently my four hired men came in. They did their parts beautifully!

First they peered through the smoke, looking from face to face, and hastily avoiding eyes that met theirs. A little of this, and one of them, the Filipino, saw the man I had described, behind the bar. He jumped a foot in the excitement of his discovery, and then, finding Gooseneck glaring at

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him, turned his back and fidgeted. The three others spotted Gooseneck now, and sneaked looks at him that were as conspicuously furtive as a set of false whiskers. Gooseneck glowered at them.

The Filipino turned around, looked at me, ducked his head sharply, and bolted for the street. The three who were left shot their drinks down their gullets and tried to catch my eye. I was reading a sign high on the wall behind the bar:

ONLY GENUINE PRE-WAR AMERICAN AND BRITISH WHISKEYS SERVED HERE

I was trying to count how many lies could be found in those nine words, and had reached four, with promise of more, when one of my confederates, the Greek, cleared his throat with the noise of a gasoline engine's backfire. Gooseneck was edging down the bar, a bung-starter in one hand, his face purple.

I looked at my assistants. Their nods wouldn't have been so terrible had they come one at a time; but they were taking no chances on my looking away again before they could get their reports in. The three heads bobbed together — a signal that nobody within twenty feet could, or did, miss — and they scooted out of the door, away from the long-necked man and his bung-starter.

I emptied my glass of beer, sauntered out of the saloon and around the corner. They were clustered where I had told them to wait.

"We'd know him! We'd know him!" they chorused.

"That's fine," I praised them. "You did great. I think you're all natural-born gumshoes. Here's your pay. Now if I were you boys, I think I'd sort of avoid that place after this; because, in spite of the clever way you covered yourselves up — and you did nobly! — he might possibly suspect something. There's no use taking chances."

They grabbed their wages and were gone before I had finished my speech.

Hooper came into my room in the San Diego hotel at a little before two the next morning.

"Gooseneck disappeared, with Gorman tailing him, immediately after your first visit," he said. "Afterward the girl went around to a 'dobe house in the edge of town, and she was still there when I knocked off. The place was dark."

Gorman didn't show up.

A bell-hop with a telegram roused me at ten o'clock in the morning. The telegram was from Mexicali:

DROVE HERE LAST NIGHT HOLED UP WITH FRIENDS SENT TWO WIRES. GORMAN

That was good news. The long-necked man had fallen for my play, had taken my four busted gamblers for four witnesses, had taken their nods for identifications. Gooseneck was the lad who had done the actual killing, and Gooseneck was in flight.

I had shed my pajamas and was reaching for my union suit when the boy came back with another wire.

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This one was from O'Gar, through the Agency:

ASHCRAFT DISAPPEARED YESTERDAY

I used the telephone to get Hooper out of bed.

"Get down to Tijuana," I told him. "Stick up the house where you left the girl last night, unless you run across her at the Golden Horseshoe. Stay there until she shows. Stay with her until she connects with a big blond Englishman, and then switch to him. He's a man of less than forty, tall, with blue eyes and yellow hair. Don't let him shake you — he's the big boy in this party just now. I'll be down. If the Englishman and I stay together and the girl leaves us, take her, but otherwise stick to him."

I dressed, put down some breakfast and caught a stage for the Mexican town. The boy driving the stage made fair time, but you would have thought we were standing still to see a maroon roadster pass us near Palm City. Ashcraft was driving the roadster.

The roadster was empty, standing in front of the adobe house, when I saw it again. Up in the next block, Hooper was doing an imitation of a drunk, talking to two Indians in the uniforms of the Mexican Army.

I knocked on the door of the adobe house.

Kewpie's voice: "Who is it?"

"Me — Parker. Just heard that Ed is back."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. A pause. "Come in."

I pushed the door open and went in. The Englishman sat tilted back in a chair, his right elbow on the table, his right hand in his coat pocket — if there was a gun in that pocket it was pointing at me.

"Hello," he said. "I hear you've been making guesses about me."

"Call 'em anything you like." I pushed a chair over to within a couple of feet of him, and sat down. "But don't let's kid each other. You had Gooseneck knock your wife off so you could get what she had. The mistake you made was in picking a sap like Gooseneck to do the turn — a sap who went on a killing spree and then lost his nerve. Going to read and write just because three or four witnesses put the finger on him! And only going as far as Mexicali! That's a fine place to pick! I suppose he was so scared that the five or six-hour ride over the hills seemed like a trip to the end of the world!"

I kept my chin going.

"You aren't a sap, Ed, and neither am I. I want to take you riding north with bracelets on, but I'm in no hurry. If I can't take you today, I'm willing to wait until tomorrow. I'll get you in the end, unless somebody beats me to you — and that won't break my heart. There's a rod between my vest and my belly. If you'll have Kewpie get it out, we'll be all set for the talk I want to make."

He nodded slowly, not taking his eyes from me. The girl came close to my back. One of her hands came over my shoulder, went under my vest, and my old black gun left me. Before she

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stepped away she laid the point of her knife against the nape of my neck for an instant — a gentle reminder.

"Good," I said when she gave my gun to the Englishman, who pocketed it with his left hand. "Now here's my proposition. You and Kewpie ride across the border with me — so we won't have to fool with extradition papers — and I'll have you locked up. We'll do our fighting in court. I'm not absolutely certain that I can tie the killings on either of you, and if I flop, you'll be free. If I make the grade — as I hope to — you'll swing, of course.

"What's the sense of scooting? Spending the rest of your life dodging bulls? Only to be nabbed finally — or bumped off trying to get away? You'll maybe save your neck, but what of the money your wife left? That money is what you are in the game for — it's what you had your wife killed for. Stand trial and you've a chance to collect it. Run — and you kiss it good-bye."

My game just now was to persuade Ed and his girl to bolt. If they let me throw them in the can I might be able to convict one of them, but my chances weren't any too large. It depended on how things turned out later. It depended on whether I could prove that Gooseneck had been in San Francisco on the night of the killings, and I imagined that he would be well supplied with all sorts of proof to the contrary. We had not been able to find a single fingerprint of the killer's in Mrs. Ashcraft's house. And if I *could* convince a jury that he was in San Francisco at the time, then I would have to show that he had done the killing. And after that I would have the toughest part of the job still ahead of me — to prove that he had done the killing for one of these two, and not on his own account.

What I was working for was to make this pair dust out. I didn't care where they went or what they did, so long as they scooted. I'd trust to luck and my own head to get profit out of their scrambling — I was still trying to stir things up.

The Englishman was thinking hard. I knew I had him worried, chiefly through what I had said about Gooseneck Flinn. Then he chuckled.

"You're balmy Painless," he said. "But you —"

I don't know what he was going to say — whether I was going to win or lose.

The front door slammed open, and Gooseneck Flinn came into the room.

His clothes were white with dust. His face was thrust forward to the full length of his long, yellow neck.

His shoe-button eyes focused on me. His hands turned over. That's all you could see. They simply turned over — and there was a heavy revolver in each.

"Your paws on the table, Ed," he snarled.

Ed's gun — if that is what he had in his pocket — was blocked from a shot at the man in the doorway by a corner of the table. He took his hand out of his pocket, empty, and laid both palms down on the table-top.

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"Stay where y'r at!" Gooseneck barked at the girl.

Gooseneck glared at me for nearly a minute, but when he spoke it was to Ed and Kewpie.

"So this is what y' wired me to come back for, huh? A trap! Me the goat for yur! I'll be y'r goat! I'm goin' to speak my piece, an' then I'm goin' out o' here if I have to smoke my way through the whole damn' Mex army! I killed y'r wife all right — an' her help, too. Killed 'em for the thousand bucks —"

The girl took a step toward him, screaming:

"Shut up, damn you!"

"Shut up, yourself!" Gooseneck roared back at her, and his thumb raised the hammer of the gun that threatened her. "I'm doin' the talkin'. I killed her for —"

Kewpie bent forward. Her left hand went under the hem of her skirt. The hand came up — empty. The flash from Gooseneck's gun lit on a flying steel blade.

The girl spun back across the room — hammered back by the bullets that tore through her chest. Her back hit the wall. She pitched forward to the floor.

Gooseneck stopped shooting and tried to speak. The brown haft of the girl's knife stuck out of his yellow throat. He couldn't get his words past the blade. He dropped one gun and tried to take hold of the protruding haft. Halfway up to it his hand came, and dropped. He went down slowly — to his knees — hands and knees — rolled over on his side — and lay still.

I jumped for the Englishman. The revolver Gooseneck had dropped turned under my foot, spilling me sidewise. My hand brushed the Englishman's coat, but he twisted away from me, and got his guns out.

His eyes were hard and cold and his mouth was shut until you could hardly see the slit of it. He backed slowly across the floor, while I lay still where I had tumbled. He didn't make a speech. A moment of hesitation in the doorway. The door jerked open and shut. He was gone.

I scooped up the gun that had thrown me, sprang to Gooseneck's side, tore the other gun out of his dead hand, and plunged into the street. The maroon roadster was trailing a cloud of dust into the desert behind it. Thirty feet from me stood a dirt-caked black touring car. That would be the one in which Gooseneck had driven back from Mexicali.

I jumped for it, climbed in, brought it to life, and pointed it at the dust-cloud ahead.

The car under me, I discovered, was surprisingly well engined for its battered looks — its motor was so good that I knew it was a border-runner's car. I nursed it along, not pushing it. For half an hour or more the dust-cloud ahead and I held our respective positions, and then I found that I was gaining.

The going was roughening. Any road that we might originally have been using had petered out. I opened up a little, though the jars it cost me

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were vicious.

I missed a boulder that would have smashed me up — missed it by a hair — and looked ahead again to see that the maroon roadster was no longer stirring up the grit. It had stopped.

The roadster was empty. I kept on.

From behind the roadster a pistol snapped at me, three times. It would have taken good shooting to plug me at that instant. I was bouncing around in my seat like a pellet of quicksilver in a nervous man's palm.

He fired again from the shelter of his car, and then dashed for a narrow arroyo — a sharp-edged, ten-foot crack in the earth — off to the left. On the brink, he wheeled to snap another cap at me — and jumped down out of sight.

I twisted the wheel in my hands, jammed on the brakes and slid the black touring car to the spot where I had seen him last. The edge of the arroyo was crumbling under my front wheels. I released the brake. Tumbled out. Shoved.

The car plunged down into the gully after him.

Sprawled on my belly, one of Gooseneck's guns in each hand, I wormed my head over the edge. On all fours, the Englishman was scrambling out of the way of the car. The car was mangled, but still sputtering. One of the man's fists was bunched around a gun — mine.

"Drop it and stand up, Ed!" I yelled.

Snake-quick, he flung himself around in a sitting position on the arroyo bottom, swung his gun up — and I smashed his forearm with my second shot.

He was holding the wounded arm with his left hand when I slid down beside him, picked up the gun he had dropped, and frisked him to see if he had any more. Then twisting a handkerchief into a tourniquet of a sort, I knotted it around his wounded arm.

"Let's go upstairs and talk," I suggested, and helped him up the steep side of the gully.

We climbed into his roadster.

"Go ahead, talk your head off," he invited, "but don't expect me to add much to the conversation. You've got nothing on me. You saw Kewpie bump Gooseneck off to keep him from peaching on her."

"So that's your play?" I inquired. "The girl hired Gooseneck to kill your wife — out of jealousy — when she learned that you were planning to shake her and return to your own world?"

"Exactly."

"Not bad, Ed, but there's one rough spot in it. You are not Ashcraft!"

He jumped, and then laughed.

"Now your enthusiasm is getting the better of your judgment," he kidded me. "Could I have deceived another man's wife? Don't you think her lawyer, Richmond, made me prove my identity?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Ed, I think I'm a smarter baby than either of them. Suppose you had a lot of stuff that belonged to Ashcraft — papers, letters, things in his handwriting? If you

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were even a fair hand with a pen, you could have fooled his wife. As for the lawyer — his making you identify yourself was only a matter of form. It never occurred to him you weren't Ashcraft.

"At first your game was to bleed Mrs. Ashcraft for an allowance — to take the cure. But after she closed out her affairs in England and came here, you decided to wipe her out and take everything. You knew she was an orphan and had no close relatives to come butting in. You knew it wasn't likely that there were many people in America who could say you were not Ashcraft."

"Where do you think Ashcraft would be while I was spending his money?"

"Dead." I said.

That got to him, though he didn't get excited. But his eyes became thoughtful behind his smile.

"You may be right, of course," he drawled. "But even at that, I don't see just how you expect to hang me. Can you prove that Kewpie didn't think I was Ashcraft? Can you prove that she knew why Mrs. Ashcraft was sending me money? Can you prove that she knew anything about my game? I rather think not."

"You may get away with it," I admitted. "Juries are funny, and I don't mind telling you that I'd be happier if I knew a few things about those murders that I don't know. Do you mind telling me about the ins and outs of your switch with Ashcraft?"

He puckered his lips and then shrugged. "I'll tell you. It won't matter greatly. I'm due to go over for this impersonation, so a confession to a little additional larceny won't matter.

"The hotel-sneak used to be my lay," the Englishman said after a pause. "I came to the States after England and the Continent got uncomfortable. Then, one night in a Seattle hotel, I worked the tarrel and put myself into a room on the fourth floor. I had hardly closed the door behind me before another key was rattling in it. The room was night-dark. I risked a flash from my light, picked out a closet door, and got behind it.

"The clothes closet was empty; rather a stroke of luck, since there was nothing in it for the room's occupant to come for. He — it was a man — had switched on the lights by then.

"He began pacing the floor. He paced it for three solid hours — up and down, up and down, up and down — while I stood behind the closet door with my gun in my hand, in case he should pull it open. For three solid hours he paced that damned floor. Then he sat down and I heard a pen scratching on paper. Ten minutes of that and he was back at his pacing; but he kept it up for only a few minutes this time. I heard the latches of a valise click. And a shot!

"I bounded out of my retreat. He was stretched on the floor, with a hole in the side of his head. A bad break for me, and no mistake! I could hear excited voices in the corridor. I stepped over the dead chap, found the letter he had been writing on the writ-

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ing-desk. It was addressed to Mrs. Norman Ashcraft, at a Wine Street number in Bristol, England. I tore it open. He had written that he was going to kill himself, and it was signed Norman. I felt better. A murder couldn't be made out of it.

"Nevertheless, I was here in this room with a flashlight, skeleton keys, and a gun — to say nothing of a handful of jewelry that I had picked up on the next floor. Somebody was knocking on the door.

" 'Get the police!' I called through the door, playing for time.

"Then I turned to the man who had let me in for all this. I would have pegged him for a fellow Britisher even if I hadn't seen the address on his letter. There are thousands of us on the same order — blond, fairly tall, well set up. I took the only chance there was. His hat and topcoat were on a chair where he had tossed them. I put them on and dropped my hat beside him. Kneeling, I emptied his pockets, and my own, gave him all my stuff, pouched all of his. Then I traded guns with him and opened the door.

"What I had in mind was that the first arrivals might not know him by sight, or not well enough to recognize him immediately. That would give me several seconds to arrange my disappearance in. But when I opened the door I found that my idea wouldn't work out as I had planned. The house detective was there, and a policeman, and I knew I was licked. But I played my hand out. I told them I had come up to my room and found this chap on the floor going through my belongings. I had seized him, and in the struggle had shot him.

"Minutes went by like hours, and nobody denounced me. People were calling me Mr. Ashcraft. My impersonation was succeeding. It had me gasping then, but after I learned more about Ashcraft it wasn't so surprising. He had arrived at the hotel only that afternoon, and no one had seen him except in his hat and coat — the hat and coat I was wearing. We were of the same size and type — typical blond Englishmen.

"Then I got another surprise. When the detective examined the dead man's clothes he found that the maker's labels had been ripped out. When I got a look at his diary, later, I found the explanation of that. He had been tossing mental coins with himself, alternating between a determination to kill himself, and another to change his name and make a new place for himself in the world. It was while he was considering the second plan that he had removed the markers from all of his clothing. But I didn't know that while I stood there among those people. All I knew was that miracles were happening.

"I had to talk small just then, but after I went through the dead man's stuff I knew him inside and outside, backward and forward. He had nearly a bushel of papers, and a diary that had everything he had ever done or thought in it. I put in the first night studying those things — memorizing them — and practicing his signature.

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Among the other things I had taken from his pockets were fifteen hundred dollars' worth of traveler's checks, and I wanted to cash them in the morning.

"I stayed in Seattle for three days — as Norman Ashcraft. I had tumbled into something rich and I wasn't going to throw it away. The letter to his wife would keep me from being charged with murder if anything slipped, and I knew I was safer seeing the thing through than running. When the excitement had quieted down I packed up and came down to San Francisco, resuming my own name — Edward Bohannon. But I held onto all of Ashcraft's property, because I had learned from it that his wife had money, and I knew I could get some of it if I played my cards right. She saved me the trouble. I ran across one of her advertisements in the *Examiner*, answered it, and — here we are."

"But you didn't have Mrs. Ashcraft killed?"

He shook his head.

I took a package of cigarettes out of my pocket and put two of them on the seat between us.

"Suppose we play a game. This is just for my own satisfaction. It won't tie anybody to anything — won't prove anything. If you did a certain thing, pick up the cigarette that is nearer me. If you didn't, pick up the one nearer you. Will you play?"

"No, I won't," he said emphatically.

"I don't like your game. But I do want a cigarette."

He reached out his uninjured arm and picked up the cigarette nearer *me*.

"Thanks, Ed." I said. "Now I hate to tell you this, but I'm going to swing you."

"You're balmy, my son."

"You're thinking of the San Francisco job, Ed," I explained. "I'm talking about Seattle. You, a hotel sneak-thief, were discovered in a room with a man who had just died with a bullet in his head. What do you think a jury will make out of that, Ed?"

He laughed at me. And then something went wrong with the laugh. It faded into a sickly grin.

"Of course you did," I said. "When you started to work out your plan to inherit all of Mrs. Ashcraft's wealth by having her killed, the first thing you did was to destroy that suicide letter of her husband's. No matter how carefully you guarded it, there was always a chance that somebody would stumble into it and knock your game on the head. It had served its purpose — you wouldn't need it. It would be foolish to chance it turning up.

"I can't put you up for the murders you engineered in San Francisco; but I can sock you with the one you didn't do in Seattle — so justice won't be cheated. You're going to Seattle, Ed, to hang for Ashcraft's suicide."

And he did.

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"The case of Crippen has been retold so often and in so many languages that the facts are known even to those students of criminal psychology who were not born in 1910, when it all happened. That he was the first murderer to be caught by wireless telegraphy, as it was then called, is today of less interest than the fact that police, counsel, and finally warders of the condemned cell all agreed that he was a 'decent little man,' a 'gentleman,' in the moral rather than the social sense of the word.

"Yet he buried portions of his wife under the floor-boards of the kitchen."

Alfred Cummarten, in his own way, was another Crippen — as you will discover when you read "The Eight Pieces of Tortoiseshell," the newest in Roy Vickers's solid-and-substantial series about the Department of Dead Ends. The Tortoiseshell Case, as the Cummarten murder might have been tagged, is another of Detective Inspector Rason's so-called "lucky" triumphs — but the police all over the world should have such "luck" in their pursuit of wrongdoing and wrongdoers!

THE EIGHT PIECES OF TORTOISESHELL

by ROY VICKERS

Alfred Cummarten had much of the mentality of Crippen. The Cummarten murder, in 1934, was a sort of tangent to the Crippen murder. As he had not read the case, Cummarten made most of Crippen's minor mistakes, avoiding the major mistake of flight. He was not as anxious as the "decent" little Crippen that no one else should suffer for his sins — a moral defect which brought its own penalty.

There was even a physical resemblance to the original, for Cummarten was a shortish man, with brown, protuberant eyes, a mustache, and a waxen complexion.

Moreover, there was, to start with, exactly the same set-up. Gertrude Cummarten, like Cora Crippen, was regarded by her husband with esteem and affection, although she was shrewish, greedy, and wholly selfish. She drilled and bullied him — for Gertrude, too, was physically larger than her husband, and would sometimes strike him in anger. That her attractions were fading at thirty-seven had, really, nothing to do with the case, because the girl, Isabel Redding, appealed primarily to Cummarten's thwarted paternal instinct.

Isabel, as is now known, was of unidentifiable origin. Someone contrived her admission to a convent school, where she acquired a certain ladylike address, if nothing else. She was twenty-two when she applied to Cummarten for employment as a stenographer. Cummarten was a shipping

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agent with a small but steady clientele.

Isabel was decorative, docile, but remarkably inefficient. Cummarten saw in her an innocent child-woman who could be moulded into the kind of woman he would like his daughter to be — if he had a daughter. So he engaged another girl to be his secretary and kept Isabel on to run the errands and stamp the envelopes.

Being a silly little man (though Scotland Yard would not agree) he asked her for the weekend to The Laurels, his modest house on the outskirts of Thadham, an old market town some twenty miles from London. He was guileless enough to suggest that his wife should elect herself an honorary aunt.

Gertrude's marked coldness did not deter Isabel from spending three more weekends at The Laurels during 1933, the last occasion being in July, when Cummarten took her to a flower show and introduced her to most of his acquaintances.

He was deeply shocked when Gertrude said she did not believe a word of his angel-child nonsense, and that, if he could afford a mistress, which surprised her, he might have the decency not to humiliate his wife by flaunting the girl before the neighbors. The truth was that he himself did believe the angel-child nonsense.

Gertrude's allegation that he was spending money on the girl was true. There was her salary, the bulk of which was a deadweight on the business. There were other expenses — not indeed for dress nor for any kind of entertainment, but for a special diet, to build up her nervous system, for massage to cure her insomnia, and even for books to nourish her mind.

Gertrude's accusation lost its horror through repetition. By the autumn of 1933 it no longer seemed outrageous to notice the physical charms of the young woman he had hitherto thought of as his spiritual daughter. In short, she became his mistress. In this period she betrayed a certain sophistication which compelled him to revise the angel-child theory, and to wonder what she had been doing between leaving the convent school and applying to him for employment.

By the turn of the year his expenditure began to alarm him. This, he believed, was largely his own fault. He would discover little needs of hers, and urge her to do the buying. It was he who suggested that she needed a new bag, not expecting that she would order one in crocodile, costing nine pounds. It was he who said she must have new hair brushes. She ordered a dressing-table set in tortoiseshell. He had admired it before she revealed it would cost one hundred guineas.

"You've been swindled, darling!" he gasped. "I've noticed things exactly like this at Harridges — for about a couple of pounds."

"But this is real tortoiseshell, darling!" she explained. "It comes from Derriere's, and they said they would always lend us sixty pounds on it if we should ever need the money. But of course I'll take it back if you think I've been extravagant."

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By ill luck he had knocked one of the scent bottles to the floor, slightly chipping the glass and slightly denting the tortoiseshell. She had been so nice about it — so anxious to cover up the damage so that the set could be returned — that he eventually sent the check to Derriere's, feeling that he had robbed Gertrude.

He was now leading a double life, which he hated. To rob it of some of its duplicity, the silly little man confided in his wife. She treated him with scorn and intensified bullying — which made him feel better, because he despised himself and felt that he ought to be punished.

In July, 1934, Isabel gave him the usual reason, true or false, for hurrying a divorce, to be followed by immediate marriage. He said he would put it to Gertrude, but did not, because he was afraid. For an utterly miserable fortnight he stalled Isabel.

On Monday, August 7th, a Bank Holiday, Isabel took the matter out of his hands by turning up uninvited at The Laurels — at half-past two in the afternoon — for a showdown.

Gertrude had been visiting a cousin at Brighton and did not return until about nine o'clock. A light rain was falling and it was getting dark — but not too dark for the neighbors to observe her return from behind their curtains. They had been, in a sense, waiting for her. They had seen Isabel arrive: they had discussed the details of her dress: in particular, a magenta scarf which was unfashionable and strident but, in her case, effective: a crocodile bag, which they opined must have cost Mr. Cummarten a matter of pounds.

As soon as I heard her footsteps I went into the hall and turned on the light, wrote Cummarten. *I meant to tell her about Isabel at once but of course I had to lead up to it a bit. So in the hall I just said something ordinary, like I hoped she had enjoyed her day.*

"Well, I did think you'd have the light on in the hall to welcome me home, even if it'd be a false welcome," said Gertrude. "But I expect we have to be careful with the housekeeping bills now that you're spending so much money on that girl. And since you ask, I didn't go to Brighton for pleasure. I went to Mabel for advice and I'm going to take her advice. Come in here and sit down, Alfred."

She took him into the little room which they called the morning-room because they had breakfast there. He obediently sat down at the table.

"Mabel says I'm a soft-hearted fool to put up with it and she's right. And it's got to be one of two things, Alfred. Either you sack that girl from the office and break off with her altogether or I'm going to divorce you."

I was so surprised when she said this after all I'd been through that I said nothing but stared at her like a ninny.

"You needn't pretend it would break your heart, Alfred. I've no doubt that you'd be glad enough to have done with our marriage altogether after the mockery you've made of it. But Mabel says the judge would make an order for you to pay me at

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least a third of your income, and perhaps half, and so you may want to think twice. *Alfred*, whose bag is that over there by the coal scuttle?"

As soon as she saw the bag I knew she would tell herself everything and I needn't try to break it gently but just answer her questions.

"It's Isabel's bag," said Cummarten.

"So she has been here! I suspected it from your sly behavior. What time did she go?"

"She didn't go. She's in the drawing-room."

"Then she's going now. I'm going to turn her out."

"You aren't," said Cummarten. "You can't get into the drawing-room. I've locked the door and I've got the key."

"What're you trying to tell me, Alfred? Go on! Say it!"

"She's dead," answered Cummarten. "I killed her."

"*Oh-h!*" It was a long drawn, whispered moan. "To think that this should happen to *me!* Oh, dear God, what have I done to deserve this!"

Characteristically, she was concerned solely with the impact of the murder on her own circumstances. She sprawled forward on the table, her face on her forearm, and burst into tears. So violent was her emotion that the silly little man went round to her side of the table to comfort her.

"There, there, my dear!" He patted her shoulder. "Don't take on so, Gert. It won't bring the poor girl back to life. Stop, Gert — you'll make yourself ill."

Presently she was able to speak, in a voice shaken with convulsive sobs.

"I was twenty-four when you married me and I'm thirty-seven now. You've had the best years of my life. I could put up with your wanting a younger woman, though it hurt my feelings more than you know. But I did believe you'd always look after me in my old age."

"Thirty-seven isn't old age, dear. Now, do calm yourself, because we've got to settle practical matters before I'm arrested."

That caught her attention.

"You haven't got any money outside the business, have you?"

"No. And I'm afraid you won't get much for that. It's largely a personal connection."

"I can't even go back to nursing. No one would employ me after this!" Her imagination still struggled against accepting the fact of disaster to herself. "Are you sure you've killed her, Alfred? Are you sure she isn't fooling you? I don't believe you could kill anybody without a revolver, which you haven't got."

"I killed her, all right. She made out we had to have a divorce and me marry her. Even if she was telling the truth about that, I've good reason to believe she could have picked on others besides me. There's one she called Len — I've seen him hanging about — big Spanish-looking feller. Never mind!"

"But you didn't have to kill her for that, Alfred!"

"Let me finish. She came down

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here on her own for a showdown with you. When she offered to say nothing to you and cut out all the divorce stuff if I'd hand over a thousand pounds, I got pretty angry. After a while, she tried to coax me into a good temper by love-making. Real love-making! I suppose I softened up a bit, and then I felt what a worm I was for letting a woman like that wheedle me. I'd got my arm round her neck in some way — can't remember quite how — and she was pretending to struggle. And I thought if I pushed her chin back it'd break her neck — sort of leverage. And I suddenly wanted to do that more than I'd ever wanted to do anything. And I did it."

"I can't believe you killed her!" Gertrude was lashing herself into wishful disbelief. "Give me that key!"

She went alone to the drawing-room. Her past training as a hospital nurse saved her from the normal revulsion. When she returned she was carrying the magenta scarf.

"You were right," she said. "I didn't think you could've done it, but you have." She went on: "I've brought this scarf, because it's the sort of thing you would leave lying about, same as you left that bag. You'd better put them both together. The neighbors will have noticed both. And we'll have a look round to see if there's anything else, before I go."

"What's the use, Gert? As soon as you've gone, I'm going to ring the police."

"I *thought* that was in your mind!" Her self-pity was lost in fury. "Going to give up without lifting a finger to save yourself? And you call yourself a man?"

"I can take what's coming to me."

"You mean you can take what's coming to *me!*" she shrilled. "You're ready to kick me into the gutter where I shall be branded for life as the wife of a murderer, and all you think about is how brave you are!"

"But what can I do?"

"You can get rid of her if you keep your head. You can use a spade, can't you! And who's to know she didn't leave the house and run off with a man who's got more money than you — not that anyone will bother their heads about what happens to that sort!"

Cummarten had planned to give himself up, because he had not been able to imagine doing anything else. But already Gertrude had planted in his brain the idea of escape. For thirteen years he had lived under her domination. In all his domestic blunders she had first bullied him and then cleared up the mess. The same process was now at work on a larger scale.

"Suppose something goes wrong?" he objected, in order to receive her reassurance, which promptly came.

"Nothing will go wrong if you do as you're told. I wasn't seen coming home tonight. It so happened that I took the bus from the junction instead of waiting for the local train, and no one else got out at the corner and there was no one about, because it was raining. I'll get along to Ealing and spend the night with mother. You

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can say I went straight there from Mabel's. You can give out that mother is ill and I'm looking after her. As soon as it's all clear, I'll come back."

"You mean we can take up our life again as if nothing had happened!" There was awe in his voice.

"I'm quite ready to try all over again to make you happy, Alfred, now that you've learned your lesson."

But she must, of course, take care not to burn her fingers. In a few minutes she had evolved a plan by which all risk was concentrated upon Cummarten. She made him repeat his orders and then:

"I'll slip out to the garage now and get into the car. The neighbors will hear the engine. And if anyone asks you afterwards, which they won't, remember to say that you were driving the girl back to her flat in London."

With a course of action laid down for him, Cummarten's nerve steadied. He made good time to London. In Holborn he dropped Gertrude at the Tube station, where she was to take a train to Ealing. He himself drove on to the flatlet, which was in one of the dingier blocks in Bloomsbury. The block had no resident porter — a fact which most of the residents regarded as an advantage.

The flatlet consisted of a fair-sized room with two curtained recesses. It was clean but untidy. Three large fans nailed on the walls gave it a would-be artistic atmosphere, helped by an elaborate cover on the ottoman bed. For the rest, there was the usual bed-sitting-room furniture.

Acting on Gertrude's instructions with all possible speed, Cummarten found Isabel's suitcase. Into it he packed her nightdress and other small oddments. Next, "any small articles you've given her that are expensive." The tortoiseshell dressing-table set was certainly expensive though it was not small, as it consisted of eight pieces including the scent bottles. It occupied two-thirds of the suitcase.

The magenta scarf he placed "carelessly" on the folding table. The crocodile bag, emptied at The Laurels, he put on the floor near the stove, as if the girl had flung it down after emptying its contents into another bag.

By midnight he was back at The Laurels.

He had brought his tools from the garage and a spade and pick from the adjoining tool-shed. He moved the table and chairs from the morning-room into the hall. Then he untacked the carpet in the morning-room and removed some of the floor-boards.

This gave him no serious difficulty — he was finished before one. Below the beams holding the floor-boards he had expected to find soft earth. Instead, he found rubble, evenly spread to a depth of some eighteen inches. Clearing this was extremely laborious: he had to work very slowly because the rubble made a dangerous amount of noise.

It was half-past three before he had cleared a sufficient area. Temporarily exhausted, he went into the

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kitchen and revived his strength with tea. When he re-started work, with the pick, he realized that his own stamina would be a major factor. Though the house had been built before cement was commonly used, the foundations had been well laid and the earth was dry and very hard.

In an hour his strokes with the pick became feeble. By six o'clock his physical condition resembled that of a boxer who has just managed to keep on his feet for a twenty-round contest. His wrists were numb and his knees were undependable. It was all he could do to hoist himself back onto the floor of the morning-room. As he lay panting he knew that, in his present condition, he could not possibly carry the body and complete his task before eight o'clock, when Bessie, the daily help, would arrive. If he were to make the attempt and fail he would be worse off than if he were to leave it in the drawing-room.

He was moving so slowly that when he had replaced everything in the morning-room and re-tacked the carpet, with his hammer-head muffled, half-past seven was striking.

Having washed, he went upstairs, got into bed for a minute in order to tumble the bedclothes, then did his best to shave as usual. When he heard Bessie arrive he came downstairs.

The drawing-room door was locked: the blinds were down, as he had left them the previous evening: the French windows giving on to the garden were bolted on the inside. He had only to keep his head and everything would be all right.

"Mrs. Cummarten," he told Bessie, "has had to go to her mother who has been taken ill. If you'll get me some breakfast, that'll be all. You can have another day off."

"All right, sir!" Bessie was not overjoyed. After Sunday and the holiday on Monday there would be arrears of cleaning which would have to be made up later. "But I'd better do the drawing-room before I go."

"You can't," said Cummarten. "It is locked and Mrs. Cummarten has evidently taken the key with her."

"That doesn't matter," returned Bessie. "The key of the morning-room fits."

"I'd rather you didn't, Bessie." With sudden misinspiration he added: "Before Mrs. Cummarten left yestering she started to clean the china. She had to break off to catch her train — and she left the pieces all over the floor. She asked me to keep the room locked."

Bessie stumped off to the kitchen. She heard him remove the keys from the morning-room and the dining-room. Knowing that something was being kept from her, she went into the garden and tried to look through the edges of the blind, but without seeing anything except part of a cushion from the settee lying on the floor.

Instead of leaving for the office at nine-fifteen, Cummarten stayed on in the morning-room, so that she could not clean it. Bessie left at ten. But before going home, she stepped

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across the road to The Cedars to tell her friend, who was help to Mrs. Evershed, all about the locked drawing-room and the nonsense about the china being on the floor.

Cummarten was dozing in his chair at eleven when Mrs. Evershed knocked at the front door.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Mr. Cummarten — I thought you'd be at the office. Can I have a word with Gertrude if she isn't busy?"

"Sorry, but she's in Ealing looking after her mother. I don't suppose it's anything much, but the doctor says the old lady had better stay in bed."

Mrs. Evershed delivered the usual polite platitudes, and then: "Did she leave a message for me about Thursday? She said she'd know for certain by Monday night."

"I haven't seen her since yesterday morning," said Cummarten.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Evershed, who was among those who had seen Gertrude return, "I thought she was coming home last night."

"She was, but she didn't. On her way back from Brighton she stopped off at Ealing, then 'phoned me that she would stay there."

Bessie's friend had already repeated to Mrs. Evershed the tale of the locked drawing-room. Mrs. Evershed carried the tale to others. Before noon there were two more callers for Gertrude, who received from Cummarten the same explanation.

During the afternoon he was left in peace and slept in his chair until nine. By midnight he was at work again on the grave. He was more careful of his strength this time and completed his task by four. The remains of Isabel and the contents of her crocodile bag and of the suitcase were buried four feet in the earth, with another eighteen inches of rubble on top. The floor-boards and the furniture were replaced.

In the drawing-room the dozen odd pieces of china had been moved from the cabinet and placed on the floor, to give substance to the tale told to Bessie. Cummarten bathed, went to bed, and slept until Bessie called him.

At breakfast he was surprised at his own freshness. "I must be as strong as a horse, when I'm put to it," he reflected with pride. That he had killed Isabel Redding ranked in his mind as a tragic misfortune, over which he must not allow himself to brood. He had a moral duty to Gertrude and so far, had made a pretty good job of it, as Gertrude herself would have to admit. He would ring her up in the middle of the morning and tell her the coast was clear.

"Has Miss Redding been in to collect her belongings, Miss Kyle?" he asked his secretary.

"I have not seen Miss Redding since Friday last," replied Miss Kyle with some hauteur, "and her belongings are still here."

"She came to my house on Monday and made it clear she would not be working for us any more. I fear," he added, "that Miss Redding has not

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been a success in this office."

Miss Kyle, who was well aware of their intimacy, said nothing.

Having dealt with his mail, he rang his mother-in-law's flat in Ealing, but could get no answer. He tried again before going out to lunch and again when he returned. Then he rang the porter of the flats — to learn that Mrs. Massell, his mother-in-law, had gone away for the weekend, had not yet come back, and that the flat was empty.

"Has Mrs. Cummarten — my wife — been to you to make enquiries?"

"No, sir, there've been no enquiries for Mrs. Massell since she went away."

Cummarten replaced the receiver and found himself badly at a loss.

"Then where on earth is Gertrude?"

Others were already asking that question — including Mrs. Massell herself. On her way back from a long weekend at Salisbury she had stopped off at Thadham to have a chat with her daughter. Arriving after Bessie had left, she was unable to obtain admission to the house. Mrs. Evershed popped out of The Cedars. Explanations were being exchanged in the front garden of The Laurels when Cummarten himself appeared.

"That's what Gertrude told me on the phone," said Cummarten doggedly.

"But she knew I had gone to Salisbury!"

"I'm not saying what she knew. I'm saying what she told me."

His mother-in-law walked him, by the sidepath, to the garden at the back of the house.

"You said all that because that Evershed woman was listening. Where is Gertrude?"

"I don't know! That's the maddening part of it!" cried Cummarten in genuine exasperation.

"When did you last see her?"

"Monday morning when she was going off to Mabel's." He added a flourish: "At least, that's where she said she was going."

Mrs. Massell gave him a hostile stare.

"Look here, Alfred, it's no use your trying to hint that she has run off with a lover. She's not that kind and wouldn't need to run when she could easily divorce you, as I happen to know. If she has disappeared, something has happened. She may have lost her memory, like those people you hear about on the radio every night. Or she may have met with an accident — she might even have been murdered, for all you know."

A long, bitter laugh broke from him, which angered her further.

"You may not care much about her, but I warn you that you will find yourself in a very awkward position if anything has happened to her and you doing nothing about it."

"But what *can* I do?"

"Come straight to the police with me and start inquiries."

"That's no good!" he said sulkily. "The police will take no notice."

"Then I am going myself," said Mrs. Massell and promptly went.

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In the Crippen case the very similar lies were exposed within a few days of the murder. Nevertheless, six months passed before the police were able to take even the preliminary steps. But Crippen had no mother-in-law, nor did he employ domestic help.

Mrs. Evershed's maid, in whom Bessie had confided, was being courted by a young constable, to whom she passed Bessie's tale and Mrs. Evershed's comments. This she did to entertain the young man, not with any idea of informing the police as such — for even at this stage there was no suspicion that a crime had been committed, in spite of the locked drawing-room.

But everyone's sense of proportion was shattered by the arrival of Mrs. Massell. When she was seen to enter the local police headquarters there was hardly anyone in the neighborhood who was not ready to believe that Cummarten had murdered his *wife*.

If the police did not jump to that conclusion, they seem to have toyed with it. By half-past nine, when he went to The Laurels, Superintendent Hoylock had tapped all sources and primed himself with every available fact, even to the details of Isabel Redding's magenta scarf and crocodile bag. He wanted, he told Cummarten, confirmation of Mrs. Massell's statement before he could ask the B.B.C. to broadcast an inquiry.

Cummarten took him into the dining-room, which was rarely used. He heard his mother-in-law's statement read and nodded confirmation of each item, inwardly fearing that Gertrude would be very angry at having her name called on the radio.

"When did you last see Mrs. Cummarten?"

"About the middle of Monday morning — before she went to Brighton."

Superintendent Hoylock folded the statement and returned it to his pocket.

"Mr. Cummarten, your wife was seen to enter this house within a few minutes of nine o'clock on Monday night."

It had not yet dawned on Cummarten that he was in immediate danger of anything but Gertrude's wrath. He looked positively angry.

"It's all Gertrude's fault for not telling me where she's gone!" he blurted out spontaneously. In spite of what Gertrude had said, he would now have to admit that she had returned on the Monday night. His anger stimulated him to a certain ingenuity in adapting the story which Gertrude had concocted.

"I'd better begin at the beginning, Superintendent. A young lady I employ at my office — a Miss Isabel Redding — came to see us in the afternoon. She has been here often — spent several weekends. She looked on us almost as relations. Lately, my wife became jealous, and everything was — well, not so pleasant as it used to be. Isabel came down to talk it all over. She waited until my wife came home. Words passed, and you may say there was a bit of a row. Soon we

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all calmed down and I drove the girl back to her flatlet. When I got back here — must have been about midnight — my wife had gone. Next morning the neighbors asked where she was. I wasn't going to tell 'em what I've been telling you, so I told 'em the first thing that came into my head. My wife may have walked out on me for all I know."

The story held up under Hoylock's questions, because it covered all the facts known to him — with one exception.

"With one thing and another, Mr. Cummarten, you've set people talking their heads off. There's a tale about something funny in your drawing-room —"

"That must be Bessie, our maid," said Cummarten. "You see, after breakfast on Monday, before my wife left for Brighton, she thought she'd clean the china —"

"So I heard," interrupted Hoylock. "It wouldn't do any harm to let me see that room."

Cummarten produced a number of keys from his pocket, unlocked the drawing-room door. The Superintendent saw drawn blinds and a litter of china on the floor — also on the floor, near the window, a cushion.

"Shows what people will say!" remarked the Superintendent. "Now I'll tell you what we'll do. If nothing develops by tomorrow morning, we'll put it up to the B.B.C. People really do get lapses of memory sometimes when they're upset. Goodnight, Mr. Cummarten. Don't you worry! We'll stop people talking!"

Talking! What were they saying?

Why, of course! Why hadn't he seen it before! They were saying that he had murdered *Gertrude!*

And what did they think he had done with her body?

Buried it under the floor-boards?

On Thursday, as Cummarten was about to leave the office for lunch, Superintendent Hoylock turned up.

"Miss Redding might be able to help us find your wife," he said. "Can I have a word with her?"

Cummarten explained. He was pleased when Hoylock asked for her address, because he wanted the police to "discover" the magenta scarf and the crocodile bag.

"It's a bit difficult to find. It'll save your time if I take you there."

Outside the flatlet, Hoylock pointed to three milk bottles with the seals unbroken.

"Tuesday, Wednesday and this morning!" he remarked and rapped on the door. "Looks as if we shan't get an answer."

Cummarten indicated that he was not surprised, and added: "I have a key — she liked me to have one."

Inside the flatlet, the Superintendent behaved, as Cummarten hoped he would, by immediately noticing the magenta scarf on the folding table.

"Is that the one she was wearing on Monday afternoon?"

"Let's have a look! Yes, that's the one, all right."

Hoylock's eye traveled to the croc-

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odile bag lying on the floor.

"Wonder why she hasn't taken her bag with her?"

"She had more than one." Cummarten picked up the bag and displayed the empty interior. "She evidently shifted her money and whatnots to another bag."

"So *she's* disappeared too!" exclaimed Hoylock. "That's what I call a most peculiar coincidence!"

"Not much coincidence in it, really!" said Cummarten quickly. "When I was up here with her on Monday night she said she was going straight off to a feller."

"There and then? Without telling the man she was coming?"

"I didn't believe it any more than you," said Cummarten. "She started packing things before I left, but I thought she was putting on an act."

"What's the man's name?"

"Don't know. She used to refer to him as 'Len'. I saw him hanging about outside once. Tall, dark chap, thick eyebrows and sidewhiskers. Like a Spaniard. Sort o' chap who appeals to women."

Hoylock made a note of the description. Next, he opened the wardrobe, then the drawers of the dressing-table. Cummarten wished he would ask if there were anything missing from the dressing-table. But Hoylock said the wrong thing.

"She didn't take much with her, did she?"

"There was very little room in her one suitcase," said Cummarten, "because she had to take her dressing-table set — brushes, combs, scent bottles — eight pieces in all. I saw her packing them."

"What! All that junk when she'd only got one suitcase!"

"It was a very valuable set," explained Cummarten. "A present from myself — with my wife's approval, of course! It was real tortoiseshell. I paid Derriere's a hundred guineas for it."

"A hundred guineas!" Hoylock was impressed and elaborated his notes.

Everything, thought Cummarten, was going just right, though he wondered why Hoylock was showing such detailed interest in Isabel.

"Miss Redding," he said, "is certain to turn up in a few days to collect her things. Is it your idea, Superintendent, that she and my wife have gone off together?"

"I don't say they have. But I do say that if Mrs. Cummarten doesn't turn up after the radio appeal we shall have to find this girl."

Superintendent Hoylock returned to Thadham to file a detailed report — Cummarten to his office to spend the afternoon wondering what had happened to Gertrude.

After the nine o'clock news that night Gertrude's name was called among those missing from their homes and believed to be suffering from a loss of memory.

Cummarten sat up until after midnight in the hope that she might turn up. It didn't occur to him that her absence might have a wholly selfish explanation. For his peace of mind he forced himself to accept the loss-of-

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memory theory. Someone had told him that the broadcasts always found such persons, if they were alive. He saw clearly what his fate would be if the broadcast failed to produce results in a very few days.

When Cummarten entered his office the next morning he found a young man chatting to Miss Kyle.

"Mr. Cummarten," said Miss Kyle, "this gentleman is from Scotland Yard."

Cummarten managed to say "Good morning." But it was a minute or more before he could understand what the young man was saying.

"In a boarding house in West Kensington, Mr. Cummarten. We can get there in twenty minutes in a taxi. If the lady is Mrs. Cummarten I can then notify the B.B.C."

The lady was indeed Mrs. Cummarten. She was being virtually held prisoner by the proprietress of the boarding house, who had been suspicious from the first of this visitor who had paid a deposit in lieu of luggage.

Gertrude had the presence of mind to tell the plainclothes youngster that her memory was a blank from the moment she left Brighton on the previous Monday. While the report for the B.B.C. was being filled in, Cummarten telephoned a telegram to Superintendent Hoylock.

In the taxi that was taking them to the station, their first moment alone, Gertrude asked:

"Is everything all right, Alfred?"

"Absolutely! Only it would have been everything all wrong if you hadn't been found. I say — did you really have a lapse of memory?"

"Of course not! In the train I suddenly remembered mother was at Salisbury. I daren't ring you up — in case. It wouldn't have been safe to do anything but just keep out of the way. I was getting short of money. I tried yesterday to catch you on the Tube without anybody seeing me."

He failed to perceive her callous indifference to his own fate, contented himself with a modest grumble.

"This time yesterday everybody thought I'd murdered you. In another day or two —"

"Well, then, that's the best thing that could have happened, when you come to think of it!"

In the train, in an unoccupied compartment, he gave her his account. To his surprise she was extremely annoyed when he told her about the locked drawing-room and the china.

"As if anybody would believe I'd be so silly! What would be the sense of putting the china on the floor?"

"I couldn't think of anything else to say on the spur of the moment."

"The less you think about the whole thing now, the better. I shall pretend I've forgotten everything, and they can't get over that."

The neighbors did not even try to get over it. The prestige of the B.B.C. had the illogical effect of making everyone believe that the lapse of memory must have been genuine. Police interest vanished with the return of Mrs. Cummarten. The neighborhood forgot its disappointment in a major

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scandal that had failed to materialize.

A month later Isabel Redding's landlord distrained on the flatlet for nonpayment of rent. A dressmaker complained that Isabel had obtained a credit of forty pounds by false pretenses. The Bloomsbury police, after a perfunctory attempt to find her, reported her as missing. As missing she appeared in the official police publication. Superintendent Hoylock, remembering the name, sent a copy of his report to Scotland Yard.

"Same old story!" grunted the inspector in charge. "You can never trace these girls. You may pick 'em up by chance some day. Or you may not!"

With which remark he dropped the report into the basket which would eventually be emptied in the Department of Dead Ends.

The Cummartens resumed the even tenor of their life together. Though neither was strong in logic or in law they knew, in general terms, that before the police can start digging up a man's garden or lifting his floorboards, they must establish before a magistrate a *prima facie* case that somewhere therein he has feloniously concealed a corpse.

They knew also that it was now impossible to establish such a case.

In May 1935 the Cummartens went to Brighton to stay for a fortnight with Gertrude's cousin Mabel. While they were away, one Leonard Haenlin, a tall, dark, handsome scoundrel, remarkable for his sidewhiskers, was charged by a wealthy spinster with stealing her automobile and defrauding her in other ways.

The defense was that the car and the other articles and sums of money were gifts, and it looked as if the defense would succeed. The police had recognized that this man was a professional despoiler of women and were working up the case. His rooms were equipped with a number of expensive articles — including a handsome and obviously expensive dressing-table set of eight pieces, in real tortoiseshell.

When asked to account for the latter, he grinned in the face of Detective-Inspector Karslake.

"You think they are not mine. For once, you happen to be right. They belong to a girl friend, who lent them to me. Her name is Isabel Redding." He added the address of the flatlet.

One of Karslake's men went to the flatlet to check up — to be humiliated by the information that Scotland Yard had posted the girl as missing the previous September.

A chit was duly sent to Detective Inspector Rason asking for any available light on the ownership of the tortoiseshell set. Having found the reference in Superintendent Hoylock's report, Rason called on Haenlin, who was out on bail, to see the set.

"When did you borrow it, Len?"

"She lent it to me to pawn on July twentieth last year. If you look it up, you'll find that on that day I was fined forty quid for a little misunderstanding in Piccadilly. Derriere's, where it came from, said they'd

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always lend her sixty quid on it. But one of the bottles had a dent and a chip — the mutt who gave it to her knocked it off her table — and they would only spring forty-five."

"A good tale, old man — but you're switching this set with another," chirped Rason. "D'you know where Isabel got her set?"

"Yes. From a funny little bloke with a pasty face called Cummarten."

"July twentieth, you said," returned Rason. "Stand by for a shock! On the night of Monday, August seventh, Mr. Cummarten saw Isabel packing her tortoiseshell set into her suitcase."

"He didn't — he only thought he did," grinned Haenlin. "Listen! I knew I couldn't redeem the stuff for a while, and Pasty Face might miss it from Isabel's table. So we went to Harridges and paid thirty-seven-and-six for an imitation set, like enough to that one for old Pasty Face not to know the difference. I redeemed the other set last month — you can check up if you want to."

"That's big of you, Len. Where shall I find her to check up?"

"Wish I knew! She's a good kid, that!"

"Very good not to bother you about her tortoiseshell."

"Can't make out why she hasn't been round!" Haenlin scowled. "I'm not sure she isn't holding out on me. She went down to make a row between Pasty Face and his wife, saying she must have a divorce. She reckoned to touch for a thousand. Maybe she got it and is spending the dough on her own. Can't think of any other reason why she has kept out of my way."

At Derriere's, Rason learned that Haenlin's tale of the purchase and the subsequent pawning was true. Therefore the tale about the imitation set, which had successfully deceived Cummarten, must also be true. But it didn't make sense.

"If the girl was off in a hurry with one suitcase, she wouldn't stuff it with the whole eight pieces of doodah which she knew to be practically valueless. Even if she had pretended to Cummarten that she was taking them, she'd have unpacked 'em as soon as he left the flatlet. Hm! Probably Hoylock has muddled his facts."

At Thadham, however, it soon became clear to Rason that Superintendent Hoylock had not muddled his facts. He heard Hoylock's full story, which included the story of the locked drawing-room and the china.

"So all Tuesday that door was locked — and most of Wednesday? And the blinds were down?"

When Hoylock assented, Rason asked for Bessie's address. By indirect means he contrived that the girl should show him the china, of which he noted that there were only a dozen small pieces.

On the way back he surveyed progress, if any.

"The next check-up is whether it's true the girl was blackmailing Cummarten for a thousand. Hm! Simplest way to do that would be to ask Cummarten."

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Two days later, when the Cummartens stepped out of the Brighton train at Victoria Station, they were surprised to find that Bessie had come to meet them. And Bessie was not alone.

Rason stepped forward and announced himself, positively groveling with apology.

"I'm very sorry indeed to pounce on you like this, Mr. Cummarten, and I hope Mrs. Cummarten will forgive me. It's about the Haenlin case — I daresay you read about it."

Cummarten felt the pain in his breathing apparatus vanish.

"We have a strong suspicion that Haenlin is the man you told Superintendent Hoylock last year that you had seen outside the flatlet of Miss Redding — whom, by the way, we haven't traced yet."

Cummarten, with something approaching graciousness, agreed to accompany Rason to the Yard to identify Haenlin. Now that the whole thing had blown over, he wished he had never mentioned "Len" to the superintendent. Still, it had been a wise precaution at the time.

"Haenlin," said Rason in the taxi, "is charged with swindling women. But we strongly suspect that he knows something about the disappearance of Miss Redding."

"He struck me as a pretty rough type," put in Cummarten, "though I suppose one shouldn't judge on appearance."

"You don't have to," said Rason. "He was working with that girl to trim you, Mr. Cummarten. He knew all about her coming down to try and sting you for a thousand quid — he admitted it when we started work on him. But he wouldn't say whether you had paid her the thousand. Would you have any objection to telling us?"

"I have no objection to telling you —" said Cummarten gaining time to reflect that such a payment could be traced "— that I did not. I couldn't afford such a sum."

So it was true that the girl had tried. That altered the perspective of all Cummarten's statements and all his actions. But perspective isn't evidence. There was still a long way to go.

"To show you how he knew all about your affairs," continued Rason, "he even mentioned that you'd given her that tortoiseshell dressing-table set and that you yourself had chipped and dented a scent bottle, thereby reducing its value."

Cummarten was shocked at this revelation of Isabel's treachery.

"I guess I'm not the first man to be made that sort of fool of," he muttered.

Rason's room, normally a disgrace to the orderliness of Scotland Yard, today looked more like a store room than an office. His desk had been pushed out of place to make room for a trestle table, the contents of which were covered with a white sheet which might almost have been a shroud.

"We shall have to keep you waiting a few minutes, Mr. Cummarten," apologized Rason. "Take a seat."

Cummarten sat down, uncomfortably close to the trestle table.

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"In the train coming up from Thadham, your maid Bessie made me laugh," chattered Rason. "Told me how she thought once you had murdered Mrs. Cummarten, because the drawing-room door was kept locked. And it all turned out to be something to do with the china being on the floor."

Cummarten, being a silly little man, took the words at their face value.

"Yes. My wife was cleaning it when she had to run for her train and —"

"Why did Mrs. Cummarten clean the china in the dark?"

Cummarten blinked as if he had not heard aright.

Rason added: "Bessie says the blinds were down."

Cummarten opened his mouth and shut it. Rason stood up, towering over him.

"D'you know, Mr. Cummarten, if a girl tried to sting me for a thousand pounds I wouldn't see her home." He drew at his cigarette. "I'd be more likely to murder her.

"And if I had murdered her I might sneak into her flat and plant her scarf and her bag — then carry off her expensive toilet set, to suggest that she had bolted."

Again Cummarten had felt that pain in his breathing apparatus. It passed, as cold fear forced him to self-control.

"I don't begin to understand you, Mr. Rason. You asked me here to identify that man —"

"Still trying to plant the murder on him, Cummarten? You packed that tortoiseshell stuff in the suitcase yourself and took it back to your house. And you know where you put it."

"I deny it!" The words came in a whispered shout.

"You're wasting your breath, Cummarten. Look at that white sheet in front of you, Cummarten. Any idea what's underneath it, Cummarten? Well, lift up the sheet and see. Go on, man!"

Cummarten sat as if paralyzed. Rason tweaked the sheet, slowly raising one corner. Cummarten stared, uncertain whether he were experiencing hallucination. For he saw on the trestle table a scent bottle, with a chip in the glass and a dent in the tortoiseshell cap.

He sprang up, tore the sheet from Rason's hand and flung it back. Spread out on the table was the complete tortoiseshell set of eight pieces.

"*You know where you put it!*" repeated Rason.

With a cough-like sound in his throat Cummarten collapsed into his chair, covering his eyes with his hands. When he removed his hands he looked like an old man, but he was wholly calm.

"I suppose it had to come some time," he said. "In a way it's a relief to get it over."

The eight pieces of tortoiseshell on the trestle table was the original set — taken from Haenlin's rooms. But the trick worked. And when they dug beneath the floorboards of the morning-room, they found the imitation set — and the remains of Isabel.

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE INNER CIRCLE

by ELLERY QUEEN

IF YOU ARE an Eastern alumnus who has not been to New York since last year's All-University Dinner, you will be astounded to learn that the famous pickled-pine door directly opposite the elevators on the thirteenth floor of your Alumni Club in Murray Hill is now inscribed: LINEN ROOM.

Visit The Alumni Club on your next trip to Manhattan and see for yourself. On the door now consigned to napery, in the area where the stainless steel medallion of Janus glistened for so long, you will detect a ghostly circumference some nine inches in diameter — all that is left of The Januarians. Your first thought will of course be that they have removed to more splendid quarters. Undeceive yourself. You may search from cellar to sundeck and you will find no crumb's trace of either Janus or his disciples.

Hasten to the Steward for an explanation and he will give you one as plausible as it will be false.

And you will do no better elsewhere.

The fact is, only a very few share the secret of The Januarians' obliteration, and these have taken a vow of silence. And why? Because Eastern is a young — a very young — temple of learning; and there are calamities only age can weather. There is more to it than even that. The cataclysm of events struck at the handiwork of the Architects themselves, that legendary band who builded the tabernacle and created the holy canons. So Eastern's shame is kept steadfastly covered with silence; and if we uncover its bloody stones here, it is only because the very first word on the great seal of Eastern University itself is: *Veritas.*

TO A HARVARD man, "Harvard '13" means little more than "Harvard '06" or "Harvard '79," unless "Harvard '13" happens to be his own graduating class. But to an Eastern man, of whatever vintage, "Eastern '13" is *sui generis.* Their names bite deep into the strong marble of The Alumni Club lobby. A member of the Class is traditionally The Honorable Mr. Honorary President of The Eastern Alumni Association. To the last man they carry gold, lifetime, non-cancellable passes to Eastern football games. At the All-University Dinner, Eastern '13 shares the Chancellor's parsley-decked table. The twined-elbow Rite of the Original Libation, drunk in foaming beer (the second most sacred canon) is dedicated to that Class and no other.

One may well ask why this exaltation of Eastern '13 as against, for example, Eastern '12, or Eastern '98? The answer is that there was no East-

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ern '12, and Eastern '98 never existed. For Eastern U. was not incorporated under the laws of the State of New York until A.D. 1909, from which it solemnly follows that Eastern '13 was the university's very first graduating class.

It was Charlie Mason who said they must be gods, and it was Charlie Mason who gave them Janus. Charlie was destined to forge a chain of one hundred and twenty-three movie houses which bring Abbott and Costello to millions; but in those days Charlie was a lean weaver of dreams, the Class Poet, an antiquarian with a passion for classical allusion. Eastern '13 met on the eve of graduation in the Private Party Room of McElvy's Bravhaus in Riverdale, and the air was boiling with pipe smoke, malt fumes, and motions when Charlie rose to make his historic speech.

"Mr. Chairman," he said to Bill Updike, who occupied the Temporary Chair. "Fellows," he said to the nine others. And he paused.

Then he said: "*We are the First Alumni.*"

He paused again.

"*The eyes of the future are on us.*" (Stan Jones was taking notes, as Recording Secretary of the Evening, and we have Charlie's address verbatim. You have seen it in The Alumni Club lobby, under glass. Brace yourself: It, too, has vanished.)

"*What we do here tonight, therefore, will initiate a whole codex of Eastern tradition.*"

And now, the Record records, there was nothing to be heard in that smoky room but the whizz of the electric fan over the lithograph of Woodrow Wilson.

"I have no hesitation in saying — out loud! — that we men in this room, tonight . . . that we're . . . Significant. Not as individuals! But as the Class of '13." And then Charlie drew himself up and said quietly: "*They will remember us and we must give them something to remember*" — (the third sacred canon).

"Such as?" said Morry Green, who was to die in a French ditch five years later.

"A sign," said Charlie. "A symbol, Morry — a symbol of our Firstness."

Eddie Temple, who was graduating eleventh in the Class, exhibited his tongue and blew a coarse, fluttery blast.

"That may be the sign *you* want to be remembered by, Ed," began Charlie crossly . . .

"Shut up, Temple!" growled Vern Hamisher.

"Read that bird out of the party!" yelled Ziss Brown, who was suspected of holding radical views because his father had stumped for Teddy Roosevelt in '12.

"Sounds good," said Bill Updike, scowling. "Go on, Charlie."

"What sign?" demanded Rod Black.

"Anything specific in mind?" called Johnnie Cudwise.

Charlie said one word.

"*Janus.*"

And he paused.

"Janus," they muttered, consider-

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ing him.

"Yes, Janus," said Charlie. "The god of good beginnings —"

"Well, we're beginning," said Morry Green.

"Guaranteed to result in good endings —"

"It certainly applies," nodded Bill Updike.

"Yeah," said Bob Smith. "Eastern's sure on its way to big things."

"Janus of the two faces," cried Charlie Mason mystically. "I wish to point out that he looks in opposite directions!"

"Say, that's right —"

"The past and the future —"

"Smart stuff —"

"Go on, Charlie!"

"Janus," cried Charlie — "Janus, who was invoked by the Romans before any other god at the beginning of an important undertaking!"

"Wow!"

"*This* is certainly important!"

"The beginning of the day, month, and year were sacred to him! *Janus was the god of doorways!*"

"*JANUS!*" they shouted, leaping to their feet; and they raised their tankards and drank deep.

And so from that night forward the annual meeting of the Class of '13 was held on Janus's Day, the first day of January; and the Class of '13 adopted, by unanimous vote, the praenomen of The Januarians. Thus the double-visaged god became patron of Eastern's posterity, and that is why until recently Eastern official stationery was impressed with his two-bearded profiles. It is also why the phrase "to be two-faced," when uttered by Columbia or N.Y.U. men, usually means "to be a student at, or a graduate of, Eastern U." — a development unfortunately not contemplated by Charlie Mason on that historic eve; at least, not consciously.

But let us leave the profounder explorations to psychiatry. Here it is sufficient to record that something more than thirty years later the phrase suddenly took on a grim verisimilitude; and The Januarians thereupon laid it, so to speak, on the doorstep of one well acquainted with such changelings of chance.

For it was during Christmas week of last year that Bill Updike came — stealthily — to see Ellery. He did not come as young Billy who had presided at the beery board in the Private Party Room of McElvy's Brauhaus on that June night in 1913. He came, bald, portly, and opulently engraved upon a card: Mr. William Updike, President of The Brokers National Bank of New York, residence Dike Hollow, Scarsdale; and he looked exactly as worried as bankers are supposed to look and rarely do.

"Business, business," said Nikki Porter, shaking her Yule-tide permanent. "It's Christmas week, Mr. Updike. I'm sure Mr. Queen wouldn't consider taking —"

But at that moment Mr. Queen emerged from his sanctum to give his secretary the lie.

"Nikki holds to the old-fashioned

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idea about holidays, Mr. Updike," said Ellery, shaking Bill's hand. "Ah, The Januarians. Isn't your annual meeting a few days from now — on New Year's Day?"

"How did you know —?" began the bank president.

"I could reply, in the manner of the Old Master," said Ellery with a chuckle, "that I've made an intensive study of lapel buttons, but truth compels me to admit that one of my best friends is Eastern '28 and he's described that little emblem on your coat so often I couldn't help but recognize it at once." The banker fingered the disc on his lapel nervously. It was of platinum, ringed with tiny garnets, and the gleaming circle enclosed the two faces of Janus. "What's the matter — is someone robbing your bank?"

"It's worse than that."

"Worse . . .?"

"Murder."

Nikki glared at Mr. Updike. Any hope of keeping Ellery's nose off the grindstone until January second was now merely a memory. But out of duty she began: "Ellery . . ."

"At least," said Bill Updike tensely, "I *think* it's murder."

Nikki gave up. Ellery's nose was noticeably honed.

"Who . . .?"

"It's sort of complicated," muttered the banker, and he began to fidget before Ellery's fire. "I suppose you know, Queen, that The Januarians began with only eleven men."

Ellery nodded. "The total graduating class of Eastern '13."

"It seems silly now, with Eastern's classes of three and four thousand, but in those days we thought it was all pretty important — "

"Manifest destiny."

"We were young. Anyway, World War I came along and we lost two of our boys right away — Morry Green and Buster Selby. So at our New Year's Day meeting in 1920 we were only nine. Then in the market collapse of '29 Vern Hamisher blew the top of his head off, and in 1930 John Cudwise, who was serving his first term in Congress, was killed in a plane crash on his way to Washington — you probably remember. So we've been just seven for many years now."

"And awfully close friends you must be," said Nikki, curiosity conquering pique.

"Well . . ." began Updike, and he stopped, to begin over again. "For a long time now we've all thought it was sort of juvenile, but we've kept coming back to those damned New Year's Day meetings out of habit or — or something. No, that's not true. It isn't just habit. It's because . . . it's *expected* of us." He flushed. "I don't know — they've — well — deified us." He looked bellicose, and Nikki swallowed a giggle hastily. "It's got on our nerves. I mean — well, damn it all, we're not exactly the 'close' friends you'd think!" He stopped again, then resumed in a sort of desperation: "See here, Queen. I've got to confess something. There's been a clique of us within The Jan-

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uarians for years. We've called ourselves . . . The Inner Circle."

"The what?" gasped Nikki.

The banker mopped his neck, avoiding their eyes. The Inner Circle, he explained, had begun with one of those dully devious phenomena of modern life known as a "business opportunity" — a business opportunity which Mr. Updike, a considerably younger Mr. Updike, had found himself unable to grasp for lack of some essential element, unnamed. Whatever it was that Mr. Updike had required, four other men could supply it; whereupon, in the flush of an earlier camaraderie, Updike had taken four of his six fellow-deities into his confidence, and the result of this was a partnership of five of the existing seven Januarians.

"There were certain business reasons why we didn't want our er . . . names associated with the ah . . . enterprise. So we organized a dummy corporation and agreed to keep our names out of it and the whole thing absolutely secret, even from our — from the remaining two Januarians. It's a secret from them to this day."

"Club within a club," said Nikki. "I think that's cute."

"All five of you in this — hrm! — Inner Circle," inquired Ellery politely, "are alive?"

"We were last New Year's Day. But since the last meeting of The Januarians . . ." the banker glanced at Ellery's harmless windows furtively, "three of us have died. *Three of The Inner Circle.*"

"And you suspect that they were murdered?"

"Yes. Yes, I do!"

"For what motive?"

The banker launched into a very involved and — to Nikki, who was thinking wistfully of New Year's Eve — tiresome explanation. It had something to do with some special fund or other, which seemed to have no connection with the commercial aspects of The Inner Circle's activities — a substantial fund by this time, since each year the five partners put a fixed percentage of their incomes from the dummy corporation into it. Nikki dreamed of balloons and noisemakers.

"— now equals a reserve of around $200,000 worth of negotiable securities."

Nikki stopped dreaming with a bump.

"What's the purpose of this fund, Mr. Updike?" Ellery was saying sharply. "What happens to it? When?"

"Well, er . . . that's just it, Queen," said the banker. "Oh, I know what you'll think . . ."

"Don't tell me," said Ellery in a terrible voice, "it's a form of tontine-insurance plan, Updike — *last survivor takes all?*"

"Yes," whispered William Updike, looking for the moment like Billy Updike.

"I knew it!" Ellery jumped out of his fireside chair. "Haven't I told you repeatedly, Nikki, there's no fool like a banker? The financial mentality rarely rises above the age of eight,

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when life's biggest thrill is to pay five pins for admission to a magic-lantern show in Stinky's cellar. This hard-eyed man of money, whose business it is to deal in safe investments, becomes party to a melodramatic scheme whereby the only way you can recoup your ante is to slit the throats of your four partners. Inner Circles! Janu-arians!" Ellery threw himself back in his chair. "Where's this silly invita-tion to murder cached, Updike?"

"In a safe-deposit box at The Brokers National," muttered the banker.

"Your own bank. Very cosy for *you*," said Ellery.

"No, no, Mr. Queen, all five of us have keys to the box —"

"What happened to the keys of the three Inner Circleites who died this year?"

"By agreement, dead members' keys are destroyed in the presence of the survivors —"

"Then there are only two keys to that safe-deposit box now in existence; yours and the key in the possession of the only other living Inner Circular?"

"Yes —"

"And you're afraid said sole-surviv-ing associate murdered the deceased trio of your absurd quintet and has his beady eye on you, Updike? — so that as the last man alive of The Inner Circle he would fall heir to the entire $200,000 boodle?"

"What else can I think?" cried the banker.

"The obvious," retorted Ellery, "which is that your three pals trav-elled the natural route of all-flesh. Is the $200,000 still in the box?"

"Yes. I looked just before coming here today."

"You want me to investigate."

"Yes, yes —"

"Very well. What's the name of this surviving fellow-conspirator of yours in The Inner Circle?"

"No," said Bill Updike.

"I beg pardon?"

"Suppose I'm wrong? If they *were* ordinary deaths, I'd have dragged someone I've known a hell of a long time into a mess. No, you investigate first, Mr. Queen. Find evidence of murder, and I'll go all the way."

"You won't tell me his name?"

"No."

The ghost of New Year's Eve stirred. But then Ellery grinned, and it settled back in the grave. Nikki sighed and reached for her notebook.

"All right, Mr. Updike. Who were the three Inner Circlovians who died this year?"

"Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, and Ziss Brown — Peter Ziss-ing Brown."

"Their occupations?"

"Bob Smith was head of the Kradle Kap Baby Foods Korporation. Stan Jones was top man of Jones-Jones-Mallison-Jones, the ad agency. Ziss Brown was retired."

"From what?"

Updike said stiffly: "Brassières."

"I suppose they do pall. Leave me the addresses of the executors, please, and any other data you think might be helpful."

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When the banker had gone, Ellery reached for the telephone.

"Oh, dear," said Nikki. "You're not calling . . . Club Bongo?"

"What?"

"You know? New Year's Eve?"

"Heavens, no. My pal Eastern '28. Cully? . . . The same to you. Cully, who are the four Januarians? Nikki, take this down . . . William Updike — yes? . . . Charles Mason? Oh, yes, the god who fashioned Olympus . . . Rodney Black, Junior — um-hm . . . and Edward I. Temple? Thanks, Cully. And now forget I called." Ellery hung up. "Black, Mason, and Temple, Nikki. The only Januarians alive outside of Updike. Consequently one of those three is Updike's last associate in The Inner Circle."

"And the question is which one."

"Bright girl. But first let's dig into the deaths of Smith, Jones, and Brown. Who knows? Maybe Updike's got something."

IT TOOK EXACTLY forty-eight hours to determine that Updike had nothing at all. The deaths of Januarians-Inner Circlers Smith, Jones, and Brown were impeccable.

"Give it to him, Velie," said Inspector Queen at Headquarters the second morning after the banker's visit to the Queen apartment.

Sergeant Velie cleared his massive throat. "The Kradle Kap Baby Foods character —"

"Robert Carlton Smith."

"Rheumatic heart for years. Died in an oxygen tent after the third heart attack in eighteen hours, with three fancy medics in attendance and a secretary who was there to take down his last words."

"Which were probably 'Free Enterprise,'" said Inspector.

"Go on, Sergeant!"

"J. Stanford Jones, the huckster. Gassed in World War I, in recent years developed t.b. And that's what he died of. Want the sanitarium affidavits, Maestro? I had photostats telephotoed from Arizona."

"Thorough little man, aren't you?" growled Ellery. "And Peter Zissing Brown, retired from brassières?"

"Kidneys and gall-bladder. Brown died on the operatin' table."

"Wait till you see what I'm wearing tonight," said Nikki. "Fuchsia taffeta —"

"Nikki, get Updike on the phone," said Ellery absently. "Brokers National."

"He's not there, Ellery," said Nikki, when she had put down the Inspector's phone. "Hasn't come into his bank this morning. It has the darlingest bouffant skirt —"

"Try his home."

"Dike Hollow, Scarsdale, wasn't it? With the new back, and a neckline that — Hello?" And after a while the three men heard Nikki say in a strange voice: "*What?*" and then: "Oh," faintly. She thrust the phone at Ellery. "You'd better take it."

"What's the matter? Hello? Ellery Queen. Updike there?"

A bass voice said: "Well . . . no, Mr. Queen. He's been in an accident."

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"Accident! Who's this speaking?"

"Captain Rosewater of the Highway Police. Mr. Updike ran his car into a ravine near his home here some time last night. We just found him."

"I hope he's all right!"

"He's dead."

"FOUR!" ELLERY WAS mumbling as Sergeant Velie drove the Inspector's car up into Westchester. "Four in one year!"

"Coincidence," said Nikki desperately, thinking of the festivities on the agenda for that evening.

"All I know is that forty-eight hours after Updike asks me to find out if his three cronies of the Inner Circle who died this year hadn't been murdered, he himself is found lying in a gulley with four thousand pounds of used car on top of him."

"Accidents," began Sergeant Velie, "will hap—"

"I want to see that 'accident'!"

A State trooper flagged them on the Parkway near a cutoff and sent them down the side road. This road, it appeared, was a shortcut to Dike Hollow which Updike habitually used in driving home from the City; his house lay some two miles from the Parkway. They found the evidence of his last drive about midway. The narrow macadam road twisted sharply to the left at this point, but Bill Updike had failed to twist with it. He had driven straight ahead and through a matchstick guardrail into the ravine. As it plunged over, the car had struck the bole of a big old oak. The shock catapulted the banker through his windshield and he had landed at the bottom of the ravine just before his vehicle.

"We're still trying to figure out a way of lifting that junk off him," said Captain Rosewater when they joined him forty feet below the road.

The ravine narrowed in a V here and the car lay in its crotch upside down. Men were swarming around it with crowbars, chains, and acetylene torches. "We've uncovered enough to show us he's mashed flat."

"His face, too, Captain?" asked Ellery suddenly.

"No, his face wasn't touched. We're trying to get the rest of him presentable enough so we can let his widow identify him." The trooper nodded toward a flat rock twenty yards down the ravine on which sat a small woman in a mink coat. She wore no hat and her smart gray hair was whipping in the Christmas wind. A woman in a cloth coat, wearing a nurse's cap, stood over her.

Ellery said, "Excuse me," and strode away. When Nikki caught up with him he was already talking to Mrs. Updike. She was drawn up on the rock in a foetal position.

"He had a directors' meeting at the bank last night. I phoned one of his associates about 2 A.M. He said the meeting had broken up at eleven and Bill had left to drive home." Her glance strayed up the ravine. "At four-thirty this morning I phoned the police."

"Did you know your husband had

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come to see me, Mrs. Updike — two mornings ago?"

"Who are you?"

"Ellery Queen."

"No." She did not seem surprised, or frightened, or anything.

"Did you know Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, Peter Zissing Brown?"

"Bill's classmates? They passed away. This year," she added suddenly. "This year," she repeated. And then she laughed. "I thought the gods were immortal."

"Did you know that your husband, Smith, Jones, and Brown were an 'inner circle' in The Januarians?"

"Inner Circle." She frowned. "Oh, yes. Bill mentioned it occasionally. No, I didn't know they were in it."

Ellery leaned forward in the wind. "Was Edward I. Temple in it, Mrs. Updike? Rodney Black, Junior? Charlie Mason?"

"I don't know. Why are you questioning me? Why —?" Her voice was rising now, and Ellery murmured something placative as Captain Rosewater hurried up and said: "Mrs. Updike. If you'd be good enough . . ."

She jumped off the rock. "*Now?*"

"Please."

The trooper captain took one arm, the nurse the other, and between them they half-carried William Updike's widow up the ravine toward the overturned car.

Nikki found it necessary to spend some moments with her handkerchief.

When she looked up, Ellery had disappeared.

SHE FOUND HIM with his father and Sergeant Velie on the road above the ravine. They were standing before a great maple looking at a road-sign. Studded lettering on the yellow sign spelled out *Sharp Curve Ahead*, and there was an elbow-like illustration.

"No lights on this road," the Inspector was saying as Nikki hurried up, "so he must have had his brights on —"

"And they'd sure enough light up this reflector sign. I don't get it, Inspector," complained Sergeant Velie. "Unless his lights just weren't workin'."

"More likely fell asleep over the wheel, Velie."

"No," said Ellery.

"What, Ellery?"

"Updike's lights were all right, and he didn't doze off."

"I don't impress when I'm c-cold," Nikki said, shivering. "But just the same, how do you know, Ellery?"

Ellery pointed to two neat holes in the maple bark, very close to the edge of the sign.

"Woodpeckers?" said Nikki. But the air was gray and sharp as steel, and it was hard to forget Mrs. Updike's look.

"This bird, I'm afraid," drawled Ellery, "had no feathers. Velie, borrow something we can pry this sign off with."

When Velie returned with some tools, he was mopping his face. "She just identified him," he said. "Gettin' warmer, ain't it?"

"What d'ye expect to find, El-

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lery?" demanded the Inspector.

"*Two full sets of rivet-holes.*"

Sergeant Velie said: "Bong," as the road-sign came away from the tree.

"I'll be damned," said Inspector Queen softly. "Somebody removed these rivets last night, and after Updike crashed into the ravine —"

"Riveted the warning sign back on," cried Nikki, "only he got careless and didn't use the same holes!"

"Murder," said Ellery. "Smith, Jones, and Brown died of natural causes. But three of the five co-owners of that fund dying in a single year —"

"Gave Number 5 an idea!"

"If Updike died, too, the $200,000 in securities would . . . Ellery!" roared his father. "Where are you running to?"

"THERE'S A POETIC beauty about this case," Ellery was saying restlessly to Nikki as they waited in the underground vaults of The Brokers National Bank. "Janus was the god of entrances. Keys were among his trappings of office. In fact, he was sometimes known as *Patulcius* — 'opener.' Opener! I knew at once we were too late."

"You knew, you knew," said Nikki peevishly. "And New Year's Eve only hours away! You can be wrong."

"Not this time. Why else was Updike murdered last night in such a way as to make it appear an accident? Our mysterious Januarian hotfooted it down here first thing this morning and cleaned out that safe-deposit box belonging to The Inner Circle. The securities are gone, Nikki."

Within an hour, Ellery's prophecy was historical fact.

The box was opened with Bill Updike's key. It was empty.

And of *Patulcius*, no trace. It quite upset the Inspector. For it appeared that The Inner Circle had contrived a remarkable arrangement for access to their safe-deposit box. It was gained, not by the customary signature on an admission slip, but through the presentation of a talisman. This talisman was quite unlike the lapel button of The Januarians. It was a golden key, and on the key was incised the two-faced god, within concentric circles. The outer circle was of Januarian garnets, the inner of diamonds. A control had been deposited in the files of the vault company. Anyone presenting a replica of it was to be admitted to The Inner Circle's repository by order of no less a personage, the vault manager informed them, than the late President Updike himself — who, Inspector Queen remarked with bitterness, had been more suited by temperament to preside over the Delancey Street Junior Spies.

"Anybody remember admitting a man this morning who flashed one of these doojiggers?"

An employee was found who duly remembered, but when he described the vault visitor as great-coated and mufflered to the eyes, wearing dark glasses, walking with a great limp, and speaking in a laryngitical whisper,

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Ellery said wearily: "Tomorrow's the annual meeting of The Januarians, dad, and *Patulcius* won't dare not to show up. We'd better try to clean it up there."

THESE, THEN, WERE the curious events preceding the final meeting of The Januarians in the thirteenth-floor sanctuary of The Eastern Alumni Club, beyond the door bearing the stainless steel medallion of the god Janus.

We have no apocryphal writings to reveal what self-adoring mysteries were performed in that room on other New Year's Days; but on January the first of this year, The Januarians held a most unorthodox service, in that two lay figures — the Queens, *pater et filius* — moved in and administered some rather heretical sacraments; so there is a full record of the last rites.

It began with Sergeant Velie knocking thrice upon the steel faces of Janus at five minutes past two o'clock on the afternoon of the first of January, and a thoroughly startled voice from within the holy of holies calling: "Who's there?" The Sergeant muttered an *Ave* and put his shoulder to the door. Three amazed, elderly male faces appeared. The heretics entered and the service began.

It is a temptation to describe in loving detail, for the satisfaction of the curious, the interior of the tabernacle — its stern steel furniture seizing the New Year's Day sun and tossing it back in the form of imperious light, the four-legged altar, the sacred vessels in the shape of beakers, the esoteric brown waters, and so on — but there has been enough of profanation, and besides the service is more to our point.

It was chiefly catechistical, proceeding in this wise:

INSPECTOR: Gentlemen, my name is Inspector Queen, I'm from Police Headquarters, this is my son Ellery, and the big mugg on the door is Sergeant Velie of my staff.

BLACK: Police? Ed, do you know anything about —?

TEMPLE: Not me, Rodney. Maybe Charlie, ha-ha . . . ?

MASON: What is it, Inspector? This is a private clubroom —

INSPECTOR: Which one are *you*?

MASON: Charles Mason — Mason's Theatre Chain, Inc. But —

INSPECTOR: The long drink of water — what's *your* name?

TEMPLE: Me? Edward I. Temple. Attorney. What's the meaning —?

INSPECTOR: I guess, Tubby, that makes you Rodney Black, Junior, of Wall Street.

BLACK: Sir —!

ELLERY: Which one of you gentlemen belonged to The Inner Circle of The Januarians?

MASON: Inner what, what?

BLACK: Circle, I think he said, Charlie.

TEMPLE: Inner Circle? What's that?

SERGEANT: One of 'em's a John Barrymore, Maestro.

BLACK: See here, we're three-

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fourths of what's left of the Class of Eastern '13 . . .

ELLERY: Ah, then you gentlemen don't know that Bill Updike is dead?

ALL: Dead! *Bill?*

INSPECTOR: Tell 'em the whole story, Ellery.

And so, patiently, Ellery recounted the story of The Inner Circle, William Updike's murder, and the vanished $200,000 in negotiable securities. And as he told this story, the old gentleman from Center Street and his sergeant studied the three elderly faces; and the theatre magnate, the lawyer, and the broker gave stare for stare; and when Ellery had finished they turned to one another and gave stare for stare once more.

And finally Charlie Mason said: "My hands are clean, Ed. How about yours?"

"What do you take me for, Charlie?" said Temple in a flat and chilling voice. And they both looked at Black, who squeaked: "Don't try to make *me* out the one, you traitors!"

Whereupon, as if there were nothing more to be said, the three divinities turned and gazed bleakly upon the iconoclasts.

And the catechism resumed:

ELLERY: Mr. Temple, where were you night before last between 11 P.M. and midnight?

TEMPLE: Let me see. Night before last . . . That was the night before New Year's Eve. I went to bed at 10 o'clock.

ELLERY: You're a bachelor, I believe. Do you employ a domestic?

TEMPLE: My man.

ELLERY: Was he —?

TEMPLE: He sleeps out.

SERGEANT: No alibi!

INSPECTOR: How about you, Mr. Black?

BLACK: Well, the fact is . . . I'd gone to see a musical in town . . . and between 11 and 12 I was driving home . . . to White Plains . . .

SERGEANT: Ha! White Plains!

ELLERY: Alone, Mr. Black?

BLACK: Well . . . yes. The family's all away over the holidays . . .

INSPECTOR: No alibi. Mr. Mason?

MASON: Go to hell. (*There is a knock on the door.*)

SERGEANT: Now who would that be?

TEMPLE: The ghost of Bill?

BLACK: You're not funny, Ed!

ELLERY: Come in. (*The door opens. Enter Nikki Porter.*)

NIKKI: I'm sorry to interrupt, but she came looking for you, Ellery. She was terribly insistent. Said she'd just recalled something about The Inner Circle, and —

ELLERY: She?

NIKKI: Come in, Mrs. Updike.

"THEY'RE HERE," SAID Mrs. Updike. "I'm glad. I wanted to look at their faces."

"I've told Mrs. Updike the whole thing," said Nikki defiantly.

And Inspector Queen said in a soft tone: "Velie, shut the door."

But this case was not to be solved

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by a guilty look. Black, Mason, and Temple said quick ineffectual things, surrounding the widow and spending their nervousness in little gestures and rustlings until finally silence fell and she said helplessly, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know," and dropped into a chair to weep.

And Black stared out the window, and Mason looked green, and Temple compressed his lips.

Then Ellery went to the window and put his hand on her shoulder. "You recall something about The Inner Circle, Mrs. Updike?"

She stopped weeping and folded her hands, resting them in her lap and looking straight ahead.

"Was it the names of the five?"

"No. Bill never told me their names. But I did remember Bill's saying to me once: 'Mary, I'll give you a hint.'"

"Hint?"

"Bill said that he once realized there was something funny about the names of the five men in The Inner Circle."

"Funny?" said Ellery sharply. "About their *names?*"

"He said by coincidence all five names had one thing in common."

"In common?"

"And he laughed." Mrs. Updike paused. "He laughed, and he said: 'That is, Mary, if you remember that I'm a married man.' I remember saying: 'Bill, stop talking in riddles. What do you mean?' And he laughed again and said: 'Well, you see, Mary, *you're in it, too.*'"

"You're in it, too," said Nikki blankly.

"I have no idea what he meant, but that's what Bill said, word for word." And now she looked up at Ellery and asked, with a sort of ferocious zest: "Does any of this help, Mr. Queen?"

"Oh, yes," said Ellery gently. "All of it, Mrs. Updike." And he turned to the three silent Januarians and said: "Would any of you gentlemen like to try your wits against this riddle?"

But the gentlemen remained silent.

"The reply appears to be no," Ellery said. "Very well; let's work it out *en masse.* Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, Peter Zissing Brown, William Updike. Those four names, according to Bill Updike, have one thing in common. What?"

"Smith," said the Inspector.

"Jones," said the Sergeant.

"Brown," said Nikki.

"Updike!" said the Inspector. "Boy, you've got me."

"Include me in, Maestro."

"Ellery, please!"

"Each of the four names," said Ellery, "has in it, somewhere, the name of a well-known college or university."

And there was another mute communion.

"Robert — Carlton — Smith," said the Inspector, doubtfully

"Smith!" cried Nikki. "*Smith College*, in Massachusetts!"

The Inspector looked startled. "J. Stanford Jones. — That California university, *Stanford!*"

"Hey," said Sergeant Velie. "Brown.

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Brown University, in Rhode Island!"

"Updike," said Nikki, then she stopped. "Updike? There's no college called Updike, Ellery."

"William Updike was his full name, Nikki."

"You mean the 'William' part? There's a Williams, with an *s*, but no William."

"What did Updike tell Mrs. Updike? 'Mary, you're in it, too.' William Updike was in it, and Mary Updike was in it . . ."

"*William and Mary College!*" roared the Inspector.

"So the college denominator checks for all four of the known names. But since Updike told his wife the fifth name had the same thing in common, all we have to do now is test the names of these three gentlemen to see if one of them is the name of a college or university — and we'll have the scoundrel who murdered Bill Updike for The Inner Circle's fortune in securities."

"Black," babbled Rodney Black, Junior. "Rodney Black, Junior. Find me a college in that, sir!"

"Charles Mason," said Charles Mason unsteadily. "Charles? Mason? You see!"

"That," said Ellery, "sort of hangs it around your neck, Mr. Temple."

"Temple!"

"*Temple University* in Pennsylvania!"

Of course, it was all absurd. Grown men who played at godhead with emblems and talismans, like boys conspiring in a cave, and a murder case which was solved by a trick of nomenclature. Eastern University is too large for that sort of childishness. And it is old enough, we submit, to know the truth:

Item: Edward I. Temple, Class of Eastern '13, did not "fall" from the thirteenth floor of The Eastern Alumni Club on New Year's Day this year. He jumped.

Item: The Patulcius Chair of Classics, founded this year, was not endowed by a wealthy alumnus from Oil City who modestly chose anonymity. It came into existence through the contents of The Inner Circle's safe-deposit box, said contents having been recovered from another safe-deposit box rented by said Temple in another bank on the afternoon of December thirty-first under a false name.

Item: The Januarian room was not converted to the storage of linen because of the expanding housekeeping needs of The Eastern Alumni Club. It was ordered so that the very name of the Society of the Two-Faced God should be expunged from Eastern's halls; and as for the stainless steel medallion of Janus which had hung on the door, the Chancellor of Eastern University himself scaled it into the Hudson River from the George Washington Bridge, during a sleet storm, one hideous night this January.

"Q"

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ANNOUNCEMENT: *As you should know by this time, we are editing a series of* original *books of short stories which sell for 25 cents per. These "First Edition Mysteries" already include four volumes of Dashiell Hammett shorts* — THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE AND OTHER STORIES (*1944*), THE CONTINENTAL OP (*1945*), THE RETURN OF THE CONTINENTAL OP (*1945*), *and* HAMMETT HOMICIDES, *which appeared recently. In addition to at least one more book of Hammett humdingers, we have scheduled John Dickson Carr's never-previously-published book of short stories titled* DR. FELL, DETECTIVE, AND OTHER STORIES; *Roy Vickers's never-previously-published* THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS; *and Margery Allingham's never-previously-published* THE ADVENTURES OF MR. CAMPION, CRIMINOLOGIST. *But before these four important (and we use the word advisedly) books reach your favorite newsstand, we shall make available to you the very first volume of Hildegarde Withers short stories ever published — at any price. Stuart Palmer's* THE RIDDLES OF HILDEGARDE WITHERS *will be on sale in just about one month. It will contain eight of Hildy's most delicious adventures (and misadventures) — a "must" for your crime library along with the new books by Hammett, Carr, Vickers, and Allingham. Watch for them!*

We now quote from the last sentence in our special introduction to THE RIDDLES OF HILDEGARDE WITHERS: "*if there is a 25-cent* original book *that can give you more rollicking pleasure, more hilarity-and-homicide, for one slim quarter, two bits, we, the undersigned, don't know it and never heard of it!* — ELLERY QUEEN"

For a sample of what to expect, here is Stuart Palmer's newest Hildegarde Withers story — "The Monkey Murder."

THE MONKEY MURDER

by STUART PALMER

AFTER-THEATER CROWDS were flowing sluggishly around Times Square, and then suddenly an eddy was formed by the halting of a pugnacious little Irishman, who stared back over his shoulder. "A fine thing!" observed Inspector Oscar Piper with some bitterness, "when murderers walk the streets and thumb their noses at the skipper of the homicide squad!"

"Oscar!" gasped Miss Hildegarde Withers, clutching her rakish bonnet and peering into the crowd. "Did he really? That nice, neat man?"

"That nice neat man committed a nice neat murder, and now he's going scot-free, and he — well, maybe he

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didn't actually thumb his nose but he smiled and tipped his hat. That was George Wayland, the wife-strangler, blast him!"

The old-maid schoolteacher firmly gripped her friend's arm, steering him down a side street and into a smoky little basement restaurant. She ordered a bottle of chianti and two plates of spaghetti with mushrooms, and then demanded to know what this was all about.

"You were up at Cape Cod when it happened," confessed the Inspector. "This fellow Wayland killed his wife for her money, trying to cloud the issue with a phony religious-cult background. The body of Janet Wayland, a good-looking, rich, and slightly silly dame of about thirty-eight, was found mother-naked in the back bedroom of a house she owned, up on East Sixty-fourth. The place had been vacant for a year — her husband had lived at a hotel while she was away — and there weren't any servants yet, but they had moved back in, anyway, a few days before. The woman was lying on a sort of sacrificial altar, tied hand and foot. The room was fixed up so that it looked like the nightmare of a Hollywood set-designer for B-budget horror pictures. And the idol above the altar was a big ugly stuffed monkey, its tail extending into a length of rawhide which had been soaked and then allowed to dry and tighten slowly around the woman's throat. You can look at the official photos if you have a strong enough stomach."

"Please leave my stomach out of this," Miss Withers said primly. "What a weird, unbelievable sort of murder!"

"That kind we usually crack wide open in a couple of days," the Inspector told her. "Usually the hard ones are easy. When we found out that Wayland stood to inherit more than two hundred grand from his wife, and that they'd been rifting — or at least that she had just returned from a year's marital vacation in California — that seemed to cinch it. To top that, we learned that Wayland had been seen, in his wife's absence, running around with a big sexy Swede secretary, a luscious piece. That was the clincher. We arrested Wayland for murder."

"But what went wrong? Wouldn't he talk?"

"He talked our arm off. Stuck to his story that he returned from a business trip to Albany and that as soon as he got in the house he smelled the incense and heard the music. There was an automatic phonograph playing one record over and over, right there in the murder room. Oriental music, by some Russian. . . ."

"Rimsky-Korsakoff? Probably The Young Prince and the Young Princess, from *Scheherazade*." Miss Withers hummed a bit of it.

"Something like that. Anyway, he claimed that he had to break down the door of the room to get in. The neighbors heard a crash, just a minute before he rushed out yelling bloody murder. The door had actually been

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bolted on the inside — we can spot things like that — and the window was locked too. Janet Wayland had been dead for about two hours then, and he claimed he had just got in at Grand Central. He even had the right seat-stub, too — but he could have picked up one of those at the station without ever getting on a train. We figured he'd bolted the door and broken it in some time before the murder, and then set up the door and crashed it again to make the proper noise at the right time."

The schoolteacher frowned. "But Oscar —"

"Let me give you the rest of it. Wayland yelled for the lie-detector test as soon as we picked him up, but it came out haywire. He showed a guilty reaction to some of the key questions, but he gave the same reaction to three or four of the harmless ones — so that was that. We had to let him cool."

"And no doubt started to bear down on the lady in the case?"

Inspector Piper grinned. "You know our methods. We began to dig around, and we turned one of our lady-killing cops loose on the secretary. Inga Rasmussen worked as a secretary in the main office of the company where Wayland is a traveling salesman — he makes a couple of hundred a week peddling big mining machinery all over the country. Lieutenant Bartz gave the girl quite a play, but after a week he reported that as far as he could see there was nothing in it. She had only gone out with Wayland because she was new in town and didn't know anybody else. It had only been dinner and dancing anyhow, and while Wayland hadn't admitted having a wife out in California, he also didn't make any more than the usual polite passes in the taxicab on the way to take her home."

"I wouldn't even know about those," confessed Miss Withers with a faint note of regret in her voice. "But do go on."

"That's about it. We couldn't trap Wayland in any important lie. We couldn't trace any of the phony theatrical junk in the murder room, but traveling like he did, he could have picked it up here and there. He had motive and opportunity, so we piled up what evidence we had and then the district attorney refused to take it to the Grand Jury. His objection was that George Wayland, from everything we could find out about him, is such a simple, ordinary, unimaginative guy. He is Mister Average American — likes baseball, smokes popular cigarettes, reads the front page of the newspaper and then turns back to the comics. He goes to the movies to see Betty Grable and Ann Sheridan, he bets on Joe Louis and the Yankees, orders ham and eggs or steak in a restaurant, drinks beer or bourbon, and goes to church once a year on Easter. . . ."

"I don't follow," the schoolteacher interrupted. "Many murderers were average citizens. Look at Judd Gray, and Crippen —"

"Wait. According to the D.A., and

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I'm inclined to agree, the average citizen commits the average murder. He uses a gun or a knife if he's a man, a sash-weight or poison if he's a woman. I mean —"

"I know what you mean. Something more has gone into the composition of Janet Wayland's murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed, to paraphrase De Quincey. Something unlike Wayland — you admit he might commit a murder, but it wouldn't be the kind of murder this is, even though you're sure that somehow he did it anyway!"

Piper nodded. "The murder was out of character. Any good defense attorney could point out Wayland as the average man and then ask a jury if they believed he'd think of strangling anybody with the tail of an East-Indian monkey-god. That, plus the locked-room thing, would get him off, probably. See what I mean?"

"I do indeed. But where did Wayland get the idea?"

"Must have read it somewhere. But where? Yet he did it. I've been a cop long enough to smell a real *wrongo*, and he's one."

Miss Withers sipped the last of her wine, which she had liberally diluted with seltzer. "You seem to be upon the horns of a dilemma, Oscar. I'm not vain enough to think that I can perform any miracles at this late date, but I'd like to pay a call on the lady in the case, if you happen to have her address."

The Inspector picked up the check. "Go ahead," he told her. "But you'll find that angle was very thoroughly covered."

The next day was Sunday, and shortly after noon Miss Hildegarde Withers emerged from the subway at Sheridan Square, once the haunt of artists, writers, and madcaps, and nowadays trod by more prosaic though no doubt better-shod feet. The address was on Minetta Lane, which she located with some difficulty. She climbed to the top floor and leaned heavily upon the bell, with no results. Then she knocked. A female voice from within cried "Just a minute!" and then the door was opened by a tall, flushed girl in rumpled green silk lounging pajamas. "Yes?" she said, in a pleasant but somewhat flat middle-western accent. "What is it?"

"Miss Rasmussen? My name is Withers, Hildegarde Withers. Inspector Piper, down at headquarters, suggested that I call on you for a little chat. Completely unofficial, of course. I hope it's not an inconvenient time?"

"Not at all, come on in. You'll have to excuse the mess the place is in, but a girl friend of mine was here for breakfast, and I haven't straightened up yet. Sunday is my lazy day, you know."

The room was small, with high narrow windows, and had been cheerfully if somewhat artily furnished with rattan and chintz and cheap brassware. Inga indicated the couch. "Do sit down while I fix myself up, I won't be a minute."

If it was lipstick that the girl intended to put on, she was already

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wearing a smudge of it on the lobe of her left ear. Miss Withers sniffed disapprovingly, but all the same she was resolved that if she had any choice in her next reincarnation, she was going to insist on red-gold hair, apple-blossom skin, and eyes like drowned stars. She sat there quietly until Inga returned. "No doubt you think I'm a meddlesome character," the schoolteacher began, "but after all, a woman was murdered —"

Inga flashed: "If you're harping on the Wayland thing, I never saw Mrs. Wayland and I'm sorry I ever saw Mr. Wayland and I'm not going to be badgered about it any longer!"

Miss Withers nodded. She looked at the twin wet rings on the glass top of the coffee table, then poked at the edge of the divan cushion where had been spilled some thirty-five cents in change, a small jack-knife, and a silver cigarette lighter. Then she sniffed the air judicially. "Your girl-friend smokes a pipe, doesn't she?"

Inga didn't answer, but her eyes flashed a brighter green. "Why don't you ask him to come out of the bedroom?" the schoolteacher continued quietly. "The three of us can have a nice heart-to-heart talk."

"Okay!" blazed the girl. She crossed the room with a stride like an Amazon's, and flung open the bedroom door. A man was standing there, a little foolishly, but Miss Withers saw with a start of surprise that it was not George Wayland. It was a young, very handsome police officer, in his shirt-sleeves.

"Gracious," she murmured. "If it isn't Lieutenant Bartz!"

The girl seized his arm and drew him into the room. "Tommy, make her stop asking questions and go away!"

The Lieutenant looked unhappy. "I don't see —"

"The murder of Janet Wayland is still in the open file, young man. And didn't the Inspector tell me that you had dropped this line of investigation?"

He smiled sheepishly. "I'm not on duty now, ma'am. We — we sorta got engaged, Inga and I. We can't do much about it now, though, on account of it isn't ethical for me to marry any suspect — I mean, anyone involved in a case, at least not until it's settled. You won't go telling Inspector Piper, will you?"

Miss Withers was beaming. "How perfectly romantic! So policemen do have their softer moments! I was beginning to wonder. The Inspector only proposed to me once, years ago, and he took that back before I could accept him." She congratulated them both.

"I hope now," Inga said, "you'll believe that I hardly knew that awful Wayland man. If the case could only be settled —"

Lieutenant Bartz put his arm around her. "Inga is just dying to cook my breakfasts every morning," he said. "And fight with me for the comic section."

"We'll have *two* papers!" Inga said fondly.

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"And you'll sit there and tell me what you dreamed the night before." He turned. "Inga always has the cutest dreams."

"My father," Miss Withers advised him, "always said he would rather hear it rain on a tin roof than hear a woman tell her dreams. But young love — ah, me! And all that stands in the way is the specter of Mrs. Wayland, isn't it?"

"If you're going to try to take that case out of moth-balls," the Lieutenant offered, "I'd like to help in any way I can." Inga nodded too.

"Then let's put our heads together and figure out a way for me to pay a call on George Wayland," Miss Withers said. There was an immediate huddle, with the Lieutenant suggesting that she could say she was a newspaper reporter, and Inga offering the idea of Miss Withers claiming to be a member of some religious cult that the late Mrs. Wayland had belonged to, out in California.

"I'm afraid I'm not the type for a reporter, and Wayland is no doubt allergic to them anyway by this time. And I couldn't pass as a devoted follower of the *swami* anyway. . . ."

Lieutenant Bartz snapped his fingers. "I happen to know that Wayland is trying to cash in on his wife's property. The house is going to be listed for sale, so why not pretend you're a buyer?"

"Say no more, young man!" Miss Withers took her departure, but she was only halfway down the stair when she heard the sound of young, impetuous feet, and Inga came up beside her wearing a raincoat.

"I'll walk with you as far as the corner," the girl offered. "I want to apologize for the way I talked when you first came in, and anyway I want to bring back some ice cream. Tommy loves *gelati* — that's the Italian ice cream that's so crisp and creamy."

The schoolteacher, a little touched, said that was all right. "Why didn't Tommy come too?"

"I set him to washing dishes," Inga confided. "You've got to get a man trained early the right way, I always say."

They walked on, and said another goodbye outside the little Neapolitan confectionery on the corner of the Square. "Be happy, my child," said Miss Withers. "You've had a very narrow escape."

Inga nodded slowly. "But I still can't believe Mr. Wayland did it! He was such a gentleman — and he *wasn't the type!*"

Miss Withers rode on uptown, then took the shuttle to Fifth and climbed aboard a north-bound bus. She got off at Sixty-fourth and walked east, wondering just what type George Wayland really was, and how he would receive her. The whole thing, as it turned out, was ridiculously easy, almost too easy in fact. Wayland himself answered the door when she rang the bell of the neat four-story brownstone, and seemed to have no reluctance whatever about showing the house to a prospective buyer with a very weak story.

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His smile was easy and warming. Miss Withers guessed that he was around thirty-five, a little on the plump side but well-tanned and dressed with extreme neatness. He might easily have been the man behind the railing in her bank, the vestryman at church, or the one who helped her with her bundles on a Pullman.

Wayland talked a good deal, and a little fast, but that might or might not be a sign of nervousness. "Here's the living room," he was saying. "The furniture's for sale too, if you're interested."

Miss Withers was emphatically not interested in Italian Rennaissance with all its dust-catching heavy carvings, but she nodded pleasantly. The downstairs rooms all seemed furnished with more money than taste, the pictures being reproductions of such traditional works of art as *The Blue Boy, Age of Innocence,* and *The Horse Fair.* There were few books, and those were sets of Victorian novelists, in very good bindings.

On the second floor he displayed two front bedrooms, one obviously his own for there was an expensive leather toilet kit on the chest of drawers, silver brushes, and numerous bottles of cologne and shaving lotion nearby, and a heavy silk dressing-gown on the bed. Wayland led the way toward the rear, where one doorway gaped wide like a missing tooth.

Wayland paused for a moment. "This door," he said, "is to be replaced." He made no sign of entering, but Miss Withers sailed blithely past him. The room, however, showed no clues. It was completely bare, stripped down to the baseboards. The one window, opening above the sloping roof of the kitchen, had a heavy iron grille built into the original stone — nothing larger than a cat could have entered or left that way.

Miss Withers thought that she had never seen a less productive scene-of-the-crime. She followed Wayland to the third floor, where there was nothing much of interest, and then back down again. "Now we'll have a look at the cellar," the man said. And he opened a little door which led down out of the butler's pantry.

The air which rose from the cellar's depths was dank and musty and cold, yet with a trace of perfume. For the first time Miss Hildegarde Withers felt an unpleasant chill of apprehension. Upstairs was one thing, but going down into the semi-darkness of a basement with a man supposed to have killed one woman in this house already —

Her agile mind devised all sorts of excuses. She could say that she had to run along, that her friends were waiting, that the house was too large. . . .

"'One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward!'" she quoted. After all, Wayland was no more dangerous in one place than another. She started, a little gingerly, down the stairs.

Down below there was a great pile of paper cartons, some neatly tied with string and some open and overflowing. Miss Withers saw women's

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dresses, shoes, underwear, and all the rest of it — a pitiful exhibit.

"I've asked the Goodwill people to pick that stuff up," Wayland was saying. "Just some old clothes that I have no use for now." Miss Withers followed him obediently onward, gathering from her quick glimpse of the débris that the late Mrs. Wayland had been addicted to very high heels and to the scent of gardenia. She had also, from the look of her girdles, been very fat around the middle. Wayland was at this moment delivering a lecture about construction and termites and water-heaters, but the schoolteacher only nodded from time to time. She peered into the shadows underneath the stair, noticing a rough shelf on which had been neatly arranged a row of old magazines dating, she noted, as far back as 1934. Most of them seemed to deal with women's fashions, a few with travel, and there was a long row of pulps, in the adventure and outdoor category.

Wayland saw what had caught her eyes, and came back to lift one of the periodicals from the rack, blow the dust from it, and shake his head. "I was always going to re-read some of these. But I guess there's nothing deader than old magazines. . . ."

Miss Withers was forcibly reminded of something *much* deader, when her eyes fell upon the ruins of a paneled door which had been thrown into a corner. It certainly had been most thoroughly smashed, and the marks where the bolt had torn away were clearly visible. Behind this door Janet Wayland had been murdered. . . .

"There's one thing I may as well tell you," Wayland said. "It may queer the sale of the house. My wife died here, in fact she was murdered —"

"Yes, I know," said Miss Withers, backing away a little.

"Oh, then you *did* read the papers!"

She nodded. "But I'm not at all fidgety about such things. I imagine that if most old houses could talk, they'd have a tale of violence and tragedy to tell."

He nodded agreeably. "I never want to see the place again, of course. I'm anxious to sell it, and use the money in trying to trace down the murderer of my wife. The police are helpless, but I intend to try the big private agencies. . . ." He shook his head. "But of course that wouldn't interest you, except that I'm in a position to accept any halfway-reasonable offer for the house."

They went on back past the magazines, past the pitiful heap of the dead woman's clothing, and up the steep stair. "Well," said George Wayland, "that's the works. You've seen everything. *What do you think about it?*"

His eyes met hers directly, but they were wary, amused, and almost teasing. The schoolteacher suddenly realized what he was thinking. He hadn't for a moment been fooled about her being a possible purchaser. In some odd way, perhaps almost in spite of himself, he was letting her know that he had murdered his wife, that he was

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getting away with it, and that he dared her to say or do anything.

"Think it over," Wayland continued. "You don't have to make up your mind today." He laughed, and his laughter to Miss Withers seemed as hard and brittle as the breaking of wood — or the crackle of thorns under a pot. Somehow she managed to keep from screaming, to hold herself from bursting into panicky flight, until he had opened the front door for her once more. "Thank you for coming," said George Wayland. "And *do* remember me to your friend the Inspector."

The door closed, and Miss Withers scuttled down the street, her feathers ruffled, for all the world like a scandalized hen. "Laugh in my face, will he? The nerve of him!" A moment or so later she almost burst out laughing, realizing that her tone had almost exactly been that of the Inspector last night when he complained that Wayland had thumbed his nose at him.

But how had the man known who she was? He couldn't have remembered her from that chance encounter on the crowded street. Unless he had eyes in the back of his head, or was in league with the devil. Of course, according to one way of thinking, *all* murderers were in league with the devil. . . .

The Inspector dropped over, later that night, to find Miss Withers perched before her aquarium of tropical fish, so deeply immersed in that miniature world that she had to shake her head violently for a moment to get back to everyday. It was a sure sign that she was in mental turmoil.

She told him of her call on Inga Rasmussen, leaving out for the moment any mention of the Lieutenant, and also told him of her later venture into the house on East Sixty-fourth. "I see now what you mean about that man, Oscar," she admitted. "He killed her, and he's laughing!"

"He'll have something else to laugh about," the Inspector informed her wearily as he sank into a chair. "*The Dispatch*, it seems, is going to nail my hide to the wall in its Sunday section next week. They've dug up a lot of stuff on the Wayland murder, and they've stolen or faked some photos of the room. 'Police Powerless in Weird Love Cult Killing' — you know the sort of thing. It embarrasses the mayor, and he blasts at the Commissioner, and the Commish blasts at me. It's a hot seat to be sitting in. If Wayland would make just one mistake —"

"He doesn't look like a man who makes mistakes," Miss Withers said. "If only we could make one *for* him!" She provided the unhappy policeman with coffee and doughnuts, and insisted upon his smoking one of his fat green-brown perfectos, usually verboten in her vicinity. "Cheer up, Oscar. In a week, anything can happen!"

"Sure — I can break my leg," he said dismally.

"I might have an idea," she continued hopefully. "I do believe I feel one coming on!"

"Heaven save us from any more of

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your ideas," Piper said ungallantly. "I've got headaches enough as it is."

All the same, when the days of the week slipped by without any word from the lady who usually referred to herself as self-appointed gadfly to the police department, the Inspector began to get restive. He had postponed warning the powers upstairs about the forthcoming newspaper article, hoping against hope that something would happen. On Friday he called the press room downstairs, located the reporter who had tipped him off, and demanded to know what was the latest moment at which the article could be jerked. "It's put to bed at five o'clock tonight," he was told.

"Thanks," said the Inspector grimly, and then put in a call for Miss Withers. "Just wondered how you are, and what's new?" he opened.

"Oh, Oscar! One of my guppies is having young — or what *do* you call baby fish?"

"Puppies!" cried Inspector Oscar Piper, a little hysterically. "Guppies' puppies! Of all the —"

"No need to shout. By the way, I've been giving some thought to that other matter. Something you said the other night gave me an idea. Of course it all depends on one thing and another —"

"What things? I sit here on a hot stove, and you double-talk!"

"Oh, whether there is a pay-phone in the ice cream store, and what kind of a job they did for me out at the printing plant at Dunellen, New Jersey, and what time the Goodwill Industries truck gets around —"

He began to burble again, but she promised to call back, and hung up.

A few moments later Miss Withers's phone rang again. This time it was Lieutenant Bartz. "Just wondered if you were getting anywhere with your sleuthing," he said cheerily. "Anything I can do to help? I'm worried —"

"I'm sure you both are," Miss Withers said cryptically.

"That's right. Inga and I are very anxious, because if the case doesn't get settled, why then we can't get married."

"Exactly. Believe me, you'll be the first to know. Or almost the first, anyway." Miss Withers went back to her aquarium, where the female guppy was having trouble with her eleventh offspring. The viviparous mite finally had to be removed by a pair of tweezers, its mother wrapped in wet cotton and then replaced in the tank, whereupon she immediately produced numbers twelve and thirteen.

It was shortly after four o'clock when the schoolteacher received her long-awaited call. "This is Mac speakin'," came the querulous, unsteady voice of a lifelong alcoholic. "It's all set, ma'am. We made the pick-up this aft'noon."

"Well, thank heavens!" Miss Hildegarde Withers immediately seized her capacious handbag, her umbrella, and then jammed on a headpiece which looked, as the Inspector had once said, as if it had been designed by somebody who had heard of hats but never

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actually seen one.

Her trip downtown, and her entrance into the office of the Inspector, were breathless. The little man looked up from his desk, which was littered with half-smoked cigars. "Come down to say goodbye, Hildegarde? Because Monday morning I expect to be sitting at a precinct desk —"

"Nonsense, Oscar. You're not going to be *busted*, to use your own ungrammatical term. Because you're going out right now and arrest George Wayland for the murder of his wife."

"Oh, I am?" The Inspector snorted.

She nodded brightly. "And while you're there, go down in the cellar and pick up a copy of one of the magazines on the cellar shelf. It is, if I remember correctly, *Tropical Adventure Tales* for October, 1939, and there is something on page twenty-six that you simply must read. The district attorney will be interested in it later, but right now you must read it out loud to Mr. Wayland, after you have him here."

Inspector Piper stared at her, hard. "On the level?"

She nodded. "Cross my heart."

The Inspector hesitated, shrugged, and then suddenly went into action. As soon as he had left the office, Miss Withers picked up the telephone. "Inspector Piper wants you to locate Lieutenant Bartz," she said sweetly to the man at the police switchboard, "and ask him to come down at once . . . because there's good news for him!"

Then she calmly sat down, having sowed the wind, to await the whirlwind. The hands of the clock were at quarter to five when the cavalcade arrived — first the Inspector, then George Wayland fuming and spluttering between two uniformed patrolmen, and finally a pair of plainclothes detectives, one of whom bore a copy of a battered pulp magazine with a lurid cover.

Wayland saw Miss Withers, and bowed. "Now I begin to see —" he began bitterly.

"Not yet, but you will," the Inspector promised. "Sit down, Mr. Wayland, and I'll read you a bedtime story — out of a magazine which four witnesses saw me take out of your cellar. Let's see — page twenty-six — here it is." Piper cleared his throat. "'*I peered through a tangle of vines past Ali, my trusty gun-bearer —*"

Wayland yawned. "What is this, Inspector? Isn't this cruel and inhuman treatment or something?"

"'— *past Ali, my trusty gun-bearer,*'" continued Piper determinedly, "'*and there by the flickering light of the jungle fires I saw the Witch-men dancing their ceremonial dance of death. Their bodies were painted in hideous, grotesque colors, and as they chanted they raised their arms to the vast looming statue of Hanuman, the monkey-god. . . .*'"

Miss Withers noticed that Wayland had stopped yawning. In the background Lieutenant Bartz, with Inga clinging to his arm, came into the room and stopped stock-still near the door.

The Inspector's flat, Brooklynese

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tones contrasted strangely with the purple prose he was reading, but he held his audience spellbound all the same. "'*Then I gave a shudderin' gasp of horror, for I could see Karen, her ivory-white almost nude body stretched out on the sack — the sacrificial block — so that she could move neither hand nor foot. Her pale lovely face was upraised to the idol, frozen wit' terror. The music rose to a cress — crescendo, pulsing in my veins. Swirls of incense from the stolen temple vessels rose around the tortured girl, but the worst was yet to come. No, no, this could not be! The Thing, the statue of Hanuman, the monkey-god was alive! Its tail was moving like a sinuous, hairy snake, moving down slowly to wrap itself around the throat of the helpless girl! To be continued in our next issue.*'"

Wayland had struggled to his feet. "It's a *lie!*" he screamed. "It's a frame-up! I never read that magazine —"

"You never *remembered* reading it — you never remembered where you got the idea for the murder, but you were unlucky enough to keep the proof that will send you to the Chair!" Piper held the magazine, spread open, in front of the prisoner. "In your own cellar, you mugg!"

The sweat was pouring from Wayland's round face, but he made one last feeble effort. "But the door — you admit I had to break down the door —"

"You broke it down *before* the murder was committed — and then set it up again so you could smash it at the right time, with witnesses listening!"

The fight was gone out of the man now. He held his head in his hands, sobbing a little. Miss Withers leaned over and whispered something to the Inspector. "What?" he cried.

"But, of course, Oscar. He couldn't have done it alone! Somebody had to —"

"No, no! I was alone!" cried Wayland. "Inga didn't —"

"Shut up, you fool!" Inga cried, tearing herself away from the young detective and hovering over Wayland like an avenging Fury. "You weak, sniveling fool! They've trapped you!" She stopped suddenly, biting her hand. The room was still.

"I was about to say," continued Miss Withers, "that somebody had to be on the inside of that room, to bolt the door for him so he could break it down. And what is more likely than that it should be the young lady who rushed out so fast to telephone a warning to him when she heard I was coming to snoop around?"

"Prove that in court!" Inga cried.

"Your mistake," Miss Withers advised her, "was made when you set your fiancé to washing the dishes so you could get out and make your phone call. No girl in her right mind would do a thing like that *before* she had the young man signed, sealed, and delivered."

Then everyone started talking at once. The Inspector took over, very swiftly and efficiently, at that point, and Wayland and Inga Rasmussen

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were hustled off down the hall in different directions. After a little while Piper returned to his office, mopping his forehead. Miss Withers sat there quite alone, reading *Tropical Adventure Tales.*

He nodded jubilantly. "They're both confessing a mile a minute, each trying to put the blame on the other one. Even if they repudiate the confessions later, we've got more than we need."

"Red-heads are hot-headed," Miss Withers observed. "I counted on that." She looked at her watch. "Five-thirty. I'm sorry there isn't time to stop that feature story."

"Huh? Oh, that won't matter. The editor will just look like a fool, panning us for a murder that was all washed up two days before." He looked around. "Where's young Bartz?"

"Gone to turn in his badge, for being made such a fool of. She never intended to marry him, but it was a wonderful cover-up for her while Wayland cashed in on their loot. And she had a direct pipe-line for information on what the police were doing on the case."

Piper grinned. "I'll let him sweat for a day or two, and then reprimand him and forget it. I think I'll call the boys in the press room and give them the story. You'll get credit, too — that was darn smart of you, memorizing the magazines in the cellar and then getting back copies and reading through all of them to uncover the inspiration for the murder." He looked up. "Hey, where you going?"

"I was just getting near the exit," Miss Withers said softly. "So I can make a run for it after I confess that the magazine was a *fake.* Oscar, I wrote that story myself, and paid to have it set in type and bound into a copy of an old pulp magazine similar to the ones in Wayland's cellar. I thought he wouldn't remember for sure — and you said if we could only prove where he got the idea —"

"Go on," commanded the Inspector grimly.

"So I knew the Goodwill people were going to pick up some stuff in Wayland's cellar, and I got in touch with a reformed bum who works for them — I used to give him dimes now and then — and he planted the magazine this afternoon!"

"Great Judas Priest!" whispered the Inspector.

"So we'll *never* know where Wayland actually did get the idea, but I happen to know that Inga likes to tell her dreams at the breakfast table. It might very well have been one of her nightmares — a nightmare that came true!"

She adjusted her hat so that it perched a little more precariously than before, and started out. "Come back here!" the Inspector commanded.

Miss Withers smiled feebly. "You're not furious with me?"

"Furious?" The Inspector was sheepish. "I feel like eating crow."

She beamed at him. "Make it chicken, and I'll rush home and put on the dotted Swiss and join you. Shall we say Fourchette's at eight?"

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THE HISTORY OF A RARE BOOK

Perhaps the rarest book of detective-crime short stories published in the twentieth century is THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE *by Clifford Ashdown. Only four copies are known to exist. The book was published in 1902 by Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd., of London: it is a 12mo in size, bound in either red or blue pictorial cloth. Records are lacking as to how many copies were actually printed and sold, but whether the number was small or large (it could hardly have been more than a couple of thousand at the most), all but four of the original edition have apparently vanished into the limbo of lost books. Bibliophiles and bookscouts have scoured England and America, seeking fanatically in the most likely and unlikely places; yet their findings after nearly half a century of eagle-eyed and expert excavating total exactly four copies — no more, no less. . . . One is the copyright copy deposited, and still residing, in the British Museum of London. The second is the copy owned by the internationally famous book collector, Ned Guymon of San Diego, California, whose collection of detective novels is the most complete in the world. The third is the copy recently acquired by P. M. Stone of Waltham, Massachusetts. And the fourth is the author's — Clifford Ashdown's — own copy.*

The identity of the author was for many years an impenetrable secret. Even today the mystery is only half-solved. Clifford Ashdown is the pseudonym once used jointly by R. Austin Freeman and a medical confrère. Before his death on September 30, 1943 Dr. Freeman acknowledged his share in the collaboration, but he steadfastly refused to reveal the identity of his friend and coworker. All attempts to learn the name of Dr. Freeman's collaborator-in-crime have ended in one of detectivedom's most baffling "sealed rooms." The secret may persist through the ages. . . .

The author's personal copy, therefore, is the one Dr. Freeman himself owned. This copy is unquestionably the most desirable one extant: it is autographed by Dr. Freeman and superbly extra-illustrated. In addition to the frontispiece and three printed illustrations which the publisher made part of the book's format, fourteen more illustrations have been cleverly interleaved. The extra illustrations were taken from "Cassell's Magazine," where the Romney Pringle stories originally appeared from June 1902 through November 1902.

A short time ago your Editor arranged for the purchase of Dr. Freeman's own copy. It is now one of the most prized books in your Editor's library of

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detective-crime short stories. At the time of this writing the Ellery Queen collection is 95% complete — we lack only 60 of the 1200 known books of detective shorts published since 1845. With the purchase of the fabulous ROMNEY PRINGLE, *Mrs. Freeman and her literary agent agreed to let EQMM reprint two of the Romney Pringle adventures. So, again, EQMM offers its loyal readers a rarity of first magnitude — the first appearance in print in the United States of two stories hitherto unavailable to the general public.*

Romney Pringle is a "gentleman crook" who hides behind the respectable front of "literary agent." A suave and charming scoundrel, Mr. Pringle made his pile and retired to a life of ease and comfort at Sandwich, where he divided his leisure among such highly cultural pursuits as reading, cataloguing his collection of antique gems, and cycling. On his death were found the mss. of his adventures in chicanery, the first of which now introduces to American fans one of the most "exclusive" characters in the history of crime fiction.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE:

The Assyrian Rejuvenator

by CLIFFORD ASHDOWN

As six o'clock struck the procession of the un-dined began to stream beneath the electric arcade which graces the entrance to Cristiani's. The doors swung unceasingly; the mirrors no longer reflected a mere squadron of tables and erect serviettes; a hum of conversation now mingled with the clatter of knives and the popping of corks; and the brisk scurry of waiters' slippers replaced the stillness of the afternoon.

Although the restaurant had been crowded some time before he arrived, Mr. Romney Pringle had secured his favorite seat opposite the feminine print after Gainsborough, and in the intervals of feeding listened to a selection from Mascagni through a convenient electrophone, price sixpence in the slot. It was a warm night for the time of year, a muggy spell having succeeded a week of biting northeast wind, and as the evening wore on the atmosphere grew somewhat oppressive, more particularly to those who had dined well. Its effects were not very visible on Pringle, whose complexion (a small port-wine mark on his right cheek its only blemish) was of that fairness which imparts to its fortunate possessor the air of youth

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until long past forty; especially in a man who shaves clean and habitually goes to bed before two in the morning.

As the smoke from Pringle's Havana wreathed upwards to an extractor, his eye fell not for the first time upon a diner at the next table. He was elderly, probably on the wrong side of sixty, but with his erect figure might easily have claimed a few years' grace, while the retired soldier spoke in his scrupulous neatness, and in the trim of a carefully tended mustache. He had finished his dinner but remained seated, studying a letter with an intentness more due to its subject than to its length, which Pringle could see was by no means excessive. At last, with a gesture almost equally compounded of weariness and disgust, he rose and was helped into his overcoat by a waiter, who held the door for him in the obsequious manner of his kind.

The languid attention which Pringle at first bestowed on his neighbor had by this time given place to a deeper interest, and as the swing-doors closed behind the old gentleman, he scarcely repressed a start, when he saw lying beneath the vacant table the identical letter which had received such careful study. His first impulse was to run after the old gentleman and restore the paper, but by this time he had disappeared, and the waiter being also invisible, Pringle sat down and read:

"*The Assyrian Rejuvenator Co.*,
82, Barbican, E. C., April 5th.

"*Dear Sir*, — We regret to hear of the failure of the 'Rejuvenator' in your hands. This is possibly due to your not having followed the directions for its use sufficiently closely, but I must point out that we do not guarantee its infallible success. As it is an expensive preparation, we do not admit the justice of your contention that our charges are exorbitant. In any case we cannot entertain your request to return the whole or any part of the fees. Should you act upon your threat to take proceedings for the recovery of the same, we must hold your good self responsible for any publicity which may follow your trial of the preparation.

"Yours faithfully,
"HENRY JACOBS,
"*Secretary.*

"Lieut.-Col. Sandstream,
"*272, Piccadilly, W.*"

To Pringle this businesslike communication hardly seemed to deserve so much consideration as Colonel Sandstream had given it, but having read and pondered it over afresh, he walked back to his chambers in Furnival's Inn.

He lived at No. 33, on the left as you enter from Holborn, and anyone scaling the stone stairs who reached the second floor might observe on the entrance to the front set of chambers the legend, *Mr. Romney Pringle, Literary Agent.* According to high authority, the reason for being a literary agent is to act as a buffer between the ravening publisher and his prey. But although a very fine oak bureau with capacious pigeon-holes stood conspic-

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uously in Pringle's sitting-room, it was tenanted by no rolls of mss. or typewritten sheets. Indeed, little or no business appeared to be transacted in the chambers. The buffer was at present idle — "resting," to use the theatrical expression.

Mr. Pringle was an early riser, and as nine o'clock chimed the next morning from the brass lantern-clock which ticked sedately on a mantel unencumbered by the usual litter of a bachelor's quarters, he had already spent some time in consideration of last night's incident, and a further study of the letter had only served thoroughly to arouse his curiosity, and decided him to investigate the affair of the mysterious *Rejuvenator*. Unlocking a cupboard in the bottom of the bureau, he disclosed a regiment of bottles and jars. Sprinkling a few drops from one onto a hare's-foot, he succeeded with a little friction in entirely removing the port-wine mark from his cheek. Then from another phial he saturated a sponge and rubbed it into his eyebrows, which turned in the process from their original yellow to a jetty black. From a box he selected a waxed mustache (that most facile article of disguise), and having attached it with a few drops of spirit-gum, covered his scalp with a black wig which, as is commonly the case, remained an aggressive fraud in spite of the most assiduous adjustment. Satisfied with the completeness of his disguise, he sallied out in search of the offices of the *Assyrian Rejuvenator*, affecting a military bearing which his slim but tall and straight-backed figure readily enabled him to assume.

"My name is Parkins — Major Parkins," said Pringle, as he opened the door of a mean-looking room on the second floor of No. 82, Barbican. He addressed an oleaginous-looking gentleman, whose curly locks and beard suggested the winged bulls of Nineveh, and who appeared to be the sole representative of the concern. The latter bowed politely and handed him a chair.

"I have been asked," Pringle continued, "by a friend who saw your advertisement to call upon you for some further information."

Now the subject of rejuvenation being a delicate one, the business of the company was mainly transacted through the post. So seldom, indeed, did a client desire a personal interview that the Assyrian-looking gentleman jumped to the conclusion that his visitor was interested in quite another matter.

"Ah, yes! You refer to *Pelosia*," he said briskly. "Allow me to read you an extract from the prospectus."

And before Pringle could reply he proceeded to read from a small leaflet with unctuous elocution: "The sovereign remedy of MUD has long been used with the greatest success in the celebrated baths of Schwalbach and Franzenbad. The proprietors of *Pelosia* having noted the beneficial effect which many of the lower animals derive from the consumption of earth with their food, have been led to investigate the internal uses of mud.

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The success which has crowned the treatment of some of the longest-standing cases of dyspepsia (the disease so characteristic of this neurotic age) has induced them to admit the world at large to its benefits. To thoroughly safeguard the public the proprietors have secured the sole right to the alluvial deposits of a stream remote from human habitation and consequently above any suspicion of contamination. Careful analysis has shown that the deposit in this particular locality, consisting of finely divided mineral particles practically free from organic admixture, is calculated to give the most gratifying results. The proprietors are prepared to quote special terms for public institutions."

"Many thanks," said Pringle, as the other momentarily paused for breath, "but I think you are under a slight misapprehension. I called on you with reference to the *Assyrian Rejuvenator*. Have I mistaken the offices?"

"Pray excuse my absurd mistake! I am secretary of the *Assyrian Rejuvenator Company*, who are also the proprietors of *Pelosia*." And in evident concern he regarded Pringle fixedly.

It was not the first time he had known a diffident person to assume an interest in the senility of an absent friend, and he mentally decided that Pringle's waxed mustache, its blue-blackness speaking loudly of hair-dye, together with the unmistakable wig, were evidence of the decrepitude for which his new customer presumably sought the Company's assistance.

"Ours, my dear sir," he resumed, leaning back in his chair and placing the tips of his fingers in apposition — "ours is a world-renowned specific for removing the ravages which time effects in the human frame. It is a secret which has been handed down for many generations in the family of the original proprietor. Its success is frequently remarkable, and its absolute failure is impossible. It is not a drug, it is not a cosmetic, yet it contains the properties of both. It is agreeable and soothing to use, and being best administered during the hours of sleep does not interfere with the ordinary avocations of everyday life. The price is so moderate — ten and sixpence, including the Government stamp — that it could only prove remunerative with an enormous sale. If you — ah, on behalf of your friend! — would care to purchase a bottle, I shall be most happy to explain its operation."

Mr. Pringle laid a half-sovereign and a sixpence on the table and the secretary, diving into a large packing-case which stood on one side, extracted a parcel. This contained a cardboard box adorned with a representation of Blake's preposterous illustration to "The Grave," in which a centenarian on crutches is hobbling into a species of banker's strong-room with a rocky top, whereon is seated a youth clothed in nothing, and with an ecstatic expression.

"This," said Mr. Jacobs impressively, "is the entire apparatus." And he opened the box, displaying a moderate-sized phial and a spirit-lamp with a little tin dish attached.

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"On retiring to rest, a teaspoonful of the contents of the bottle is poured into the receptacle above the lamp, which is then lighted, and the preparation being vaporized is inhaled by the patient."

"But how does it act?" inquired the Major a trifle impatiently.

"In this way," replied the imperturbable secretary. "Remember that the appearance of age is largely due to wrinkles; that is to say, to the skin losing its elasticity and fullness — so true is it that beauty is only skin-deep." Here he laughed gaily. "The joints grow stiff from loss of their natural tone, the figure stoops, and the vital organs decline their functions from the same cause. In a word, old age is due to a loss of *elasticity*, and that is the very property which the *Rejuvenator* imparts to the system, if inhaled for a few hours daily."

Mr. Pringle diplomatically succeeded in maintaining his gravity while the merits of the *Rejuvenator* were expounded, and it was not until he had bidden Mr. Jacobs a courteous farewell and was safely outside the office that he allowed the fastening of his mustache to be disturbed by an expansive grin.

About nine o'clock the same evening the housekeeper of the Barbican offices was returning from market, her thoughts centered on the savory piece of fried fish she was carrying home for supper.

"Mrs. Smith?" said a man's voice behind her, as she produced her latchkey.

"My name's 'Odges," she replied unguardedly, dropping the key in her agitation.

"You're the housekeeper, aren't you?" said the stranger, picking up the key and handing it to her politely.

"Lor', sir! You did give me a turn," she faltered.

"Very sorry, I'm sure. I only want to know where I can find Mr. Jacobs of the *Assyrian Rejuvenator Company*."

"Well, sir, he told me I wasn't to give his address to anyone. Not that I know it either, sir, for I always send the letters to Mr. Weeks."

"I'll see you're not found fault with. I know he won't mind your telling me." A sovereign clinked against the latchkey in her palm.

For a second she hesitated, then her eye caught the glint of the gold and she fell.

"All I know, sir, is that when Mr. Jacobs is away I send the letters — and a rare lot there are — to Mr. Newton Weeks at the Northumberland Avenue Hotel."

"Is he one of the firm?"

"I don't know, sir, but there's no one comes here but Mr. Jacobs."

"Thank you very much and good night," said the stranger; and he strode down Barbican, leaving Mrs. Hodges staring at the coin.

The next day Mr. Jacobs received a letter at his hotel:

"*April 7th.*

"*Sir*, — My friend Col. Sandstream informs me he has communicated with the police and has sworn an informa-

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tion against you in respect to the moneys you have obtained from him, as he alleges, by false pretenses. Although I am convinced that his statements are true, a fact which I can more readily grasp after my interview with you today, I give you this warning in order that you may make your escape before it is too late. Do not misunderstand my motives; I have not the slightest desire to save you from the punishment you so richly deserve. I am simply anxious to rescue my old friend from the ridiculous position he will occupy before the world should he prosecute you:

"Your obedient servant,
"JOSEPH PARKINS, Major.
"Newton Weeks, Esq.,
"*Northumberland Avenue Hotel.*"

Mr. Jacobs read this declaration of war with very mixed feelings.

So his visitor of yesterday was the friend of Colonel Sandstream! Obviously come to get up evidence against him. Knowing old dog, that Sandstream! But then how had they run him to earth? That looked as if the police had got their fingers in the pie. Mrs. Hodges was discreet. She would never have given the address to any but the police. It was annoying, though, after all his precautions; seemed as if the game was really up at last. Well, it was bound to come some day and he had been in tighter places before. He could hardly complain: the *Rejuvenator* had been going very well lately. But suppose the whole thing was a plant — a dodge to intimidate him?

He read the letter through again. The writer had been careful to omit his address, but it seemed plausible enough on the face of it. Anyhow, whatever the Major's real motive might be, Mr. Jacobs couldn't afford to neglect the warning, and the one clear thing was that London was an unhealthy place for him just at present. He would pack up, so as to be ready for all emergencies, and drive round to Barbican and reconnoitre. Then if things looked fishy, he could go to Cannon Street and catch the 11:05 Continental. He'd show them that Harry Jacobs wasn't the man to be bluffed out of his claim!

Mr. Jacob stopped his cab some doors from the *Rejuvenator* office and was in the act of alighting when he paused, spellbound at the apparition of Pringle. The latter was loitering outside No. 82, and as the cab drew up he ostentatiously consulted a large pocket-book, and glanced several times from its pages to the countenance of his victim, as if comparing a description. Attired in a long overcoat, a bowler hat, and wearing thick boots of a constabulary pattern, to the nervous imagination of Mr. Jacobs he afforded startling evidence of the police interest in the establishment; and this idea was confirmed when Pringle, as if satisfied with his scrutiny, drew a paper from the pocket-book and made a movement in his direction. Without waiting for further developments, Mr. Jacobs retreated into the cab and hoarsely whispered through

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the trap-door, "Cannon Street — as hard as you can go!"

The cabman wrenched the horse's head round. He had been an interested spectator of the scene, and sympathized with the evident desire of his fare to escape what appeared to be the long arm of the law. At this moment a "crawling" hansom came up and was promptly hailed by Pringle.

"Follow that cab and don't lose it on any account!" he cried, as he stood on the step and pointed vigorously after the receding hansom.

While Mr. Jacobs careened down Barbican, his cabman looked back in time to observe this expressive pantomine, and with the instinct of a true sportsman lashed his unfortunate brute into a hand-gallop. But the observant eye of a policeman checked this moderate exhibition of speed just as they were rounding the sharp corner into Aldersgate Street, and had not a lumbering railway van intervened Pringle would have caught him up and brought the farce to an awkward finish. But the van saved the situation. The moment's respite was all that the chase needed, and in response to the promises of largesse frantically roared by Mr. Jacobs, he was soon bounding and bumping over the wood pavement with Pringle well in the rear.

Then ensued a mad stampede down Aldersgate Street.

In and out, between the crowded files of vans and 'buses, the two cabs wound a zigzag course; the horses slipping and skating over the greasy surface, or ploughing up the mud as their bits skidded them within inches of a collision. In vain did policemen roar to them to stop — the order fell on heedless ears. In vain did officious boys wave intimidating arms, or make futile grabs at the harness of the apparent runaways. Triumphantly they piloted the narrowest of straits, and dashed unscathed into St. Martin's-le-Grand.

There was a block in Newgate Street, and the cross traffic was stopped. Mr. Jacobs' hansom nipped through a temporary gap, grazing the pole of an omnibus, and being lustily anathematized in the process. But Pringle's cabman, attempting to follow, was waved back by a policeman.

"No go, I'm afraid, sir!" was the man's comment, as they crossed into St. Paul's Churchyard after a three minutes' wait. "I can't see him nowhere."

"Never mind," said Pringle cheerfully. "Go to Charing Cross telegraph office."

There he sent the following message:

"To Mrs. Hodges, 82, Barbican. Called away to country. Mr. Weeks will take charge of office — Jacobs."

About two the same afternoon, Pringle, wearing the wig and mustache of Major Parkins, rang the housekeeper's bell at 82.

"I'm Mr. Weeks," he stated, as Mrs. Hodges emerged. "Mr. Jacobs had to leave town and has asked me to take charge of the office."

"Oh, yes, sir! I've had a telegram

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from Mr. Jacobs to say so. You know the way up, I suppose."

"I think so. But Mr. Jacobs forgot to send me the office-key."

"I'd better lend you mine then, sir, till you hear from Mr. Jacobs." She fumbled in her pocket. "I hope nothing's the matter with him?"

"Oh dear no! He found he needed a short holiday, that's all," Pringle reassured her, and taking the key he climbed to the second floor.

Sitting down at the secretarial desk, he sent a quick glance round the office. A poor creature, that Jacobs, he reflected, for all his rascality, or he wouldn't have been scared so easily. And he drew a piece of wax from his pocket and took a careful impression of the key.

He had not been in possession of the *Rejuvenator* offices for very long before he discovered that Mr. Jacobs' desire to break out in a fresh place had proved abortive. It will be remembered that on the occasion of the first interview, Mr. Jacobs assumed that Pringle's visit had reference to *Pelosia*, whose virtues he extolled in a leaflet composed in his own very pronounced style. A large package in the office Pringle found to contain many thousands of these effusions. From the absence in the daily correspondence of inquiries, it was clear that the public had failed to realize the advantages of the internal administration of mud, so that Mr. Jacobs had been forced to stick to the swindle that was already in existence. After all, the latter was a paying concern — eminently so! Besides, the patent medicine trade is rather overdone.

The price of the *Assyrian Rejuvenator* was such as to render the early cashing of remittances an easy matter. Ten-and-sixpence being a sum for which the average banker demurs to honor a check, the payments were usually made in postal orders; and Pringle acquired a larger faith in Carlyle's opinion of the majority of his fellow creatures as he cashed the previous day's takings at the General Post Office on his way up to Barbican each morning. The business was indeed a flourishing one, and his satisfaction was only alloyed by the probability of some legal interference, at the instance of Colonel Sandstream, with the further operations of the Company. But for the present Fortune smiled, and Pringle continued energetically to despatch parcels of the *Rejuvenator* in response to the daily shower of postal orders. In this, indeed, he had little trouble, for he had found many gross of parcels duly packed and ready for posting.

One day while engaged in the process, which had grown quite a mechanical one by that time, he listened absently to a slow but determined step which ascended the stairs and paused on the landing outside. Above, on the third floor, was an importer of cigars, and the visitor evidently delayed the further climb until he had regained his wind. Presently, after a preliminary pant or two, he started again, but proceeded only as far as the *Rejuvenator*-door, to which he gave a

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peremptory thump and opening it, walked in without further ceremony.

There was no need for him to announce himself. Pringle recognized him at the first glance, although he had never seen him since the eventful evening at Cristiani's restaurant.

"I'm Colonel Sandstream!" he growled, looking around him savagely.

"Delighted to see you, sir," said Pringle with assurance. "Pray be seated," he added politely.

"Who am I speaking to?"

"My name is Newton Weeks. I am —"

"I don't want to see *you*!" interrupted the Colonel testily. "I want to see the secretary of this concern."

"I regret to say that Mr. Jacobs —"

"Ah, yes! That's the name. Where is he?" again interrupted the old gentleman.

"Mr. Jacobs is out of town."

"Well, I'm not going to run after him. When will he be here again?"

"It is quite impossible for me to tell. But I was just now going to say that as the managing director of the company I am also acting as secretary during Mr. Jacobs' absence."

"What do you say your name is?" demanded the other, still ignoring the chair which Pringle had offered him.

"Newton Weeks."

"Newton Weeks," repeated the Colonel, making a note of the name on the back of an envelope.

"Managing director," added Pringle suavely.

"Well, Mr. Weeks, if you represent the *company*" — this with a contemptuous glance from the middle of the room at his surroundings — "I've called with reference to a letter you've had the impertinence to send me."

"What was the date of it?" inquired Pringle innocently.

"I don't remember!" snapped the Colonel.

"May I ask what was the subject of the correspondence?"

"Why, this confounded *Rejuvenator* of yours, of course!"

"You see we have a very large amount of correspondence concerning the *Rejuvenator*, and I'm afraid unless you have the letter with you —"

"I've lost it or mislaid it somewhere."

"That is unfortunate! Unless you can remember the contents I fear it will be quite impossible for *me* to do so."

"I remember them well enough! I'm not likely to forget them in a hurry. I asked you to return the money your *Rejuvenator*, as you call it, has cost me, because it's been quite useless, and in your reply you not only refused absolutely, but hinted that I dare not prosecute you."

As Pringle made no reply, he continued savagely: "Would you like to hear my candid opinion of you?"

"We are always pleased to hear the opinion of our clients."

Pringle's calmness only appeared to exasperate the Colonel the more.

"Well, sir, you shall have it. I consider that letter the most impudent attempt at blackmail that I have ever heard of!"

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"Blackmail!" echoed Pringle, allowing an expression of horror to occupy his countenance.

"Yes, sir! Blackmail!" asseverated the Colonel, nodding his head vigorously.

"Of course," said Pringle, with a deprecating gesture, "I am aware that some correspondence has passed between us, but I cannot attempt to remember every word of it. At the same time, although you are pleased to put such an unfortunate construction upon it, I am sure there is some misunderstanding in the matter. I must positively decline to admit that there has been any attempt on the part of the company of such a nature as you allege."

"Oh! so you don't admit it, don't you? Perhaps you won't admit taking pounds and pounds of my money for your absurd concoction, which hasn't done me the least little bit of good in the world — nor ever will! And perhaps you won't admit refusing to return my money? Eh? Perhaps you won't admit daring me to take proceedings because it would show up what an ass I've been! Don't talk to me, sir! Bah!"

"I'm really very sorry that this unpleasantness has arisen," began Pringle, "but —"

"Pleasant or unpleasant, sir, I'm going to stop your little game! I mislaid your letter or I'd have called upon you before this. As you're the managing director I'm better pleased to see you than your precious secretary. Anyhow, I've come to tell you that you're a set of swindlers! Of SWINDLERS, sir!"

"I can make every allowance for your feelings," said Pringle, drawing himself up with an air of pained dignity, "but I regret to see a holder of his Majesty's commission so deficient in self-control."

"Blast your impertinence, sir!" vociferated the veteran. "I'll let the money go, and I'll prosecute the pair of you, no matter what it costs me! Yes, you, and your rascally secretary too! I'll go and swear an information against you this very day!" He bounced out of the room, and explosively snorted downstairs.

Pringle followed in the rear, and reached the outer door in time to hear him exclaim, "Mansion House Police Court," to the driver of a motor-cab, in which he appropriately clanked and rumbled out of sight.

Returning upstairs, Pringle busied himself in making a bonfire of the last few days' correspondence. Then, collecting the last batch of postal orders, he proceeded to cash them at the General Post Office and walked back to Furnival's Inn. After all, the farce couldn't have lasted much longer.

Arrived at Furnival's Inn, Pringle rapidly divested himself of the wig and mustache and assuming his official port-wine mark became once more the unemployed literary agent.

It was now half-past one and after lunching lightly at a near restaurant he lighted a cigar and strolled leisurely eastward.

By the time he reached Barbican

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three o'clock was reverberating from St. Paul's. He entered the private bar of a tavern nearly opposite, and sat down by a window which commanded a view of No. 82.

As time passed and the quarters continued to strike in rapid succession, Pringle felt constrained to order further refreshment; and he was lighting a third cigar before his patience was rewarded. Happening to glance up at the second-floor window, he caught a glimpse of a strange man engaged in taking a momentary survey of the street below.

The march of events had been rapid. He had evidently resigned the secretaryship not a moment too soon!

Not long after a four-wheeled cab stopped outside the tavern, and an individual wearing a pair of large blue spectacles and carrying a Gladstone bag, got out and carefully scrutinized the offices of the *Rejuvenator*. Mr. Jacobs, for it was he, did not intend to be caught napping this time.

At length, being satisfied with the normal appearance of the premises, he crossed the road and to Pringle's intense amusement disappeared into the house opposite. The spectator had not long to wait for the next act of the drama.

About ten minutes after Mr. Jacobs' disappearance the man who had looked out of the second-floor window emerged from the house and beckoned to the waiting cab. As it drew up at the door, a second individual came down the steps, fast-holding Mr. Jacobs by the arm. The latter, in very crestfallen guise, re-entered the vehicle, closely followed by his captor; and the first man having taken his seat with them, the party adjourned to a destination as to which Pringle had no difficulty in hazarding a guess. Satisfying the barmaid, he sallied into the street. The *Rejuvenator* offices seemed once more to be deserted, and the postman entered in the course of his afternoon round. Pringle walked a few yards up the street and then crossing as the postman reappeared, turned back and entered the house boldly. Softly mounting the stairs, he knocked at the door. There was no response. He knocked again more loudly, and finally turned the handle. As he expected, it was locked securely and satisfied that the coast was clear he inserted his own replica of the key and entered. The books tumbled on the floor in confused heaps, the wide-open and empty drawers, and the overturned packing-cases, showed how thoroughly the place had been ransacked in the search for compromising evidence. But Pringle took no further interest in these things. The letter-box was the sole object of his attentions. He tore open the batch of newly-delivered letters and crammed the postal orders into his pockets; then, secreting the correspondence behind a rifled packing-case, he silently locked the door.

As he strolled down the street, on a last visit to the General Post Office, the two detectives passed him on their way back in quest of the "Managing Director."

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All that Detective Carney had was a bird that whistled — but that was enough for a man who could make a goldfish sing . . .

GOLDFISH

by HUGH MacNAIR KAHLER

WHEN Martin Dole came into Carney's office in the Homicide Bureau, the big policeman was bellowing into his telephone, and the surly glower with which he greeted his visitor showed no sign of the respect to which an honorable citizen, calling to assist the law in punishing the murderer of his friend and partner, should have been entitled. Dole, however, didn't resent the scowl. Respect wasn't what he wanted. He sat down and after his habit when waiting or thinking, whistled softly against his teeth. Carney, removing the transmitter from his mouth, snarled at him to cut it out.

"Sorry," Dole said. He filed away a mental note, that whistling might be a good way of making Carney angry.

Making Carney angry wouldn't have seemed sensible to anyone except a very clever man. In the ugly office at Headquarters, he looked more like a brute and bully than he had seemed, this morning, at Martin Dole's rooms. He was squat and beefy and bull-necked; there was cruelty in his small, deep-set eyes and in the lines about his mouth. Martin Dole, studying him, told himself that it wasn't any wonder that so many crooks and killers were ready to confess when they'd gone into the back room with Carney to see the pieces of rubber hose which Carney playfully called goldfish.

Evidently, though, from Carney's face and voice, the goldfish hadn't yet persuaded Pimmy Fink to admit that he'd killed Sam Dowson. Dole was disappointed. It wasn't absolutely necessary that Pimmy should confess, but from Dole's point of view it was desirable. A confession would take Pimmy into court, and even if the jury let him off the police would call it a day, probably, and pigeon-hole the case without inquiring very deeply into that alibi of Martin Dole's. And if Pimmy didn't get off, so much the better.

"Well?"

Carney slammed the receiver on its hook and turned a sullen face to Dole.

"So you haven't made Fink talk, eh?" Dole tried to look and sound sarcastic. "I thought you wouldn't."

"Yeah?" Carney felt the goad. "Well, he's done a whole lot of talking. He admits he was up at Dowson's place last night till after eleven."

"What?" Dole did his best to sound as if he hadn't spent that endless half-hour, last night, hiding in Sam Dowson's bedroom and cursing Pimmy Fink, under his breath, for not going home. "Why, that's just the same

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thing as admitting he did it!"

"Oh, yeah? There's a whole lot of difference between admitting you knocked a guy off and admitting you played his piano for him. And so far that's all the admitting Fink's done." His face changed suddenly. Something like pain came into it. "Say, f'r the love o' Pete, if you got to whistle, stay on the key, can'tcha? And get somewheres near the tune!"

He whistled a few notes, softly and beautifully.

"That's how it goes. And you keep whistling it like this!"

Even Dole's uncertain ear could recognize the fidelity with which his distortion of the air was reproduced. To find that Carney was sensitive about music, that he could repeat, note for note, something that he had heard only once, that a few flats could actually hurt him, struck Dole as almost comic. Music meant nothing to him except when it bored him. It had done a little more than that last night, as he listened to Pimmy Fink drumming away on Sam Dowson's piano, while he had been hiding in the bedroom waiting for Pimmy to go home.

It was Pimmy's fault that Dole's alibi wasn't absolutely air-tight. If it hadn't been for Pimmy, Dole would have been back at the Mirasol before anybody could have noticed that he'd been away. It seemed to him that there was a sort of poetic justice in what had happened to Pimmy Fink, in what would happen again when Carney, in an uglier humor than before, took Pimmy back for another look at those goldfish. He'd get a confession then.

"Oh, so that's his story, is it? And he's still telling it, when you've already got enough on him to—"

"Hunches ain't evidence."

"Evidence?" Dole laughed. "What do you want with it? You know who knows the answers in this case. A little half-sized runt of a piano-player. And you don't know how to make him sing for you!"

He could see the ugly lines bite deeper around Carney's mouth. The big hands were shut. It wouldn't take those hands very long to get the right answers out of Pimmy Fink. Not if Carney was sore enough.

Martin Dole leaned back and whistled hissingly between his teeth.

Carney's head jerked up. There was no anger in his face, but its sudden cheerfulness wasn't any the less cruel.

"You're off the key again, Dole, but you come close enough that time. With no more ear than you got you must've heard that tune quite a few times to whistle it even as good as that. Know what it is, Dole? It's the chorus to the song that Pimmy Fink was making up last night in Dowson's room. Nobody ever heard it except Dowson and Fink and me. And you."

He turned back his cuffs.

"It ain't evidence, but they been telling you I don't need evidence. All I need is a chance to talk to the bird that knows the right answers. Whadduyuh say we go out in the back room, Dole, and see the goldfish?"

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The earliest recollection your Editor has of reading a story by Frank King dates back to 1942. It was at the time we were preparing a final table of contents for THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, *still the first and only "feminology" of girl gumshoes and petticoat pilferers. We had just come upon an English Sunday Supplement which contained a story about a detectivette named Frances Layburn. (How good is our memory, Mr. King? — was that the lady-sleuth's name?) We recall it as an ingenious tale of a scarf killing, and as we read the story we seriously considered its inclusion in* THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES. *Then, just as we seemed to be approaching the climax — no end! The last page of text was completely missing! We tried desperately to find that last page before it was too late, but* THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES *went to press before we could lay our hands on another copy of the English periodical — and to this very day we don't know how that story turned out.*

Three years later Frank King came into our life again — and this time with the last page intact. Mr. King submitted a story to EQMM's First Annual Prize Contest. In the final balloting by the judges the story failed to place among the prizewinners, but your Editor liked "Hand of Glory" enough to purchase it for publication. "Hand of Glory" is an excellent example of the literate type of English detective story: it is smooth, suave, and stylized. Although its plot is based on a "sensational" idea, its approach — in the best English manner — is purely intellectual, with emphasis on sound and sustained deduction. And the story of sound and sustained deduction is not so common these hardboiled days that we can afford to pass over it lightly . . .

HAND OF GLORY

by FRANK KING

PUNCTUALLY at ten-thirty Tessie O'Dwyer stepped out of the lift at the fifth floor and carried her tray along the thickly carpeted corridor to Eric Kincaird's door. The management of Avondale Court, probably the most expensive service flats in London, watched over the comfort of the tenants with a motherly eye. If Mr. Kincaird wanted his breakfast at ten-thirty, he got it.

Mr. Kincaird was a late bird. Tessie O'Dwyer had heard that he was the proprietor of a night club, which would explain his fondness for bed in the mornings. He always wanted coffee, toast and marmalade at ten-thirty. It was usually Tessie's job to fetch the tray up from the restaurant.

She didn't particularly like the job, because she didn't particularly like Mr. Kincaird. In fact, she was just a

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little frightened of him. Not that he'd ever been actively unpleasant to her. But his voice snapped, and his eyes were cold. Tessie guessed that he could be very unpleasant if he thought it worthwhile.

Balancing her tray on one hand, she unlocked the door of the flat with her passkey and entered the little hall beyond. She laid the tray as usual on a small table, then knocked at the bedroom door. There was no reply. After knocking again, she tried the handle of the door. It opened readily enough. She saw that the room was empty, that the bed had not been slept in.

Nothing to be surprised about in the ordinary way; Mr. Kincaird might have been called away on business. Tessie, however, knew that he'd come home quite early last night. He'd told the porter that he was going straight to bed to nurse a cold, that he didn't want to be disturbed until the usual time this morning. A premonitory shiver ran through her. She began to feel in her bones that something was wrong.

"Mr. Kincaird!" she called softly.

The flat remained silent. The feeling in Tessie's bones grew stronger. After a moment of indecision, she crossed the hall and looked into the lounge. The first thing she noticed was the open window to the fire escape. The second was Mr. Kincaird.

He was lying on the floor near the window, half hidden from Tessie's view by the intervening grand piano. He was fully dressed and he was dead. Craning her neck, she saw the blood on his face, the bullet hole in his left temple.

When she saw something else she screamed — and screamed.

Things happened quickly. A floor valet came running. After one startled glance at Mr. Kincaird, he phoned down for the manager, then tried to calm Tessie's hysterics. The manager arrived, looked at Tessie, looked at Mr. Kincaird, and phoned for the police. White and shaken, he poured himself a cup of coffee from the tray and swallowed it.

"Horrible!" he muttered. "His hand's chopped off! Be quiet, girl!"

"The Hand of Glory!" wailed Tessie. "Mother of God! The Dead Man's Hand!"

She fainted. The manager and the valet did what they could to revive her. By the time they had succeeded, the flat was full of police, headed by Inspector Robert Jamieson, a dour and grizzled Scot.

Even that tough old war-horse was a little disconcerted by the sight of Mr. Kincaird's right wrist. He began an investigation on routine lines. After an hour of concentrated effort by all concerned, his rugged features had become even grimmer than usual. When Doctor Grant, the police surgeon, shook his head and shrugged hopelessly, he made up his mind.

"Beats me, too," he said slowly. "I reckon this is a case for Mr. Trevor."

"Not a bad idea," agreed the surgeon.

"It's the only idea," growled Jamieson.

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He went to the telephone and put through his call, then sent one of his men out for a packet of cigarettes.

Peter Trevor, tall, well-built, gorgeously arrayed in a blue pin-stripe suit looking as though it had just come from a tailor's press, gazed down on Mr. Kincaird. The heavy dark eyebrows bunched together in a frown.

"Certainly a curious case, Jimmy," he commented. "Found the missing hand?"

"No."

"Anything to explain the — er — surgery?"

"Looks like the work of a madman to me. That fool of a girl babbles about a Hand of Glory. She says in the part of Ireland where she comes from —"

"I know. An old superstition. By no means confined to Ireland. Always carry a dead man's hand in your pocket and you can perform all sorts of miracles. Much more potent than a rabbit's foot. How does it go in the Ingoldsby Legends?

'Open lock To the Dead Man's knock!
Fly bolt, and bar, and band! —
Nor move, nor swerve, Joint, muscle, or nerve,
At the spell of the Dead Man's hand!
Sleep all who sleep! — Wake all who wake! —
But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!'

Moderately accurate, I believe. As you see, a magic spell, Jimmy. Rather like Love — laughs at locksmiths. Everyone petrified; can neither move nor speak. Indispensable to the really efficient burglar, don't you think? Got a cigarette?"

Jamieson had one ready. "No one believes such nonsense nowadays, Mr. Trevor," he said, offering a light.

"Thanks. I'm not so sure you're right. Old superstitions die hard. Your Irish colleen must have at least the relics of a sneaking belief or she wouldn't have been so upset." Peter grinned. "But we won't commit ourselves just yet, eh? Let's see if our silent friend here can offer any suggestions."

Carefully hitching up his immaculate trousers, he knelt beside the body and began his examination. As he worked he whistled softly and tunelessly. The air was just recognizable as *Annie Laurie*. It set Jamieson's teeth on edge. He preferred Mr. Trevor in a talkative mood.

After a while the whistling ceased abruptly. Peter rose to his feet, brushed some cigarette ash from his waistcoat, and threw the stub into the hearth.

"Impossible to be dogmatic so long afterwards," he said. "But I'd fix the time of death at approximately nine o'clock last night."

Jamieson nodded. "That's Doctor Grant's estimate."

"The cause was laceration of the brain, due to a medium-sized revolver bullet. This was fired from a distance of about six feet. Grant agree?"

"Yes."

"It entered the left temple and

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emerged above the right ear. Found it?"

"It's nowhere in the room. Obviously went out of the window."

"Ah! You think the window was already open when the shot was fired?"

"Must have been."

"I suppose so. Let's forget the Hand of Glory for a while and try to visualize what happened." Peter retreated a couple of paces from the body. "If the bullet went through the window the murderer fired from about here. Standing up; nothing near enough to sit on. Death would be instantaneous, so Kincaird was quite near the window when he died. He was standing up, too; the direction of the bullet was almost horizontal. Queer, don't you think? What could he be doing by the window?"

"Perhaps opening it."

"Why?"

"Maybe the room was too hot. There was a big fire. The ashes are still warm."

"That's queer, too. Central heating, electric radiator — and a fire."

"I asked the manager about it. He says a lot of the tenants prefer open fires, so they're always left laid ready for lighting."

"Kincaird had a cold, of course. He might have felt like — Yet he told the porter he intended going straight to bed. The fact that he'd an unexpected visitor hardly seems to explain why he wanted a fire."

Peter rummaged in his pockets, then snapped his fingers irritably. Knowing the gesture, Jamieson gave him a cigarette and lit it.

"Thanks. What time did Kincaird return here last night?"

"Ten past eight."

"No one was noticed coming up to his flat after that?"

"No."

"But I suppose anyone could have come up without being noticed?"

"Easily. The porters kept fairly busy; telephone exchange, messages, and so on. Anyone could watch his opportunity and sneak in."

"And there are no indications of burglary? No suggestion that the window was opened from outside?"

"If you look at the catch, Mr. Trevor, you'll see that's impossible. It's not a type that can be forced from outside."

"Right. Then the murderer came up to the flat in the ordinary way. He may have been waiting for Kincaird; or he may have followed him. If the shooting occurred about nine, as we believe, he couldn't have been very much later than his victim. And by the same token, Jimmy, Kincaird didn't open the window because the room was too hot."

"Who says so?"

"I do. Even if he lit the fire as soon as he came in, it couldn't generate an uncomfortable heat in less than an hour."

Jamieson grunted. "That's true."

"Then why did he open the window?"

"He wouldn't be trying to escape, perhaps?"

"The window was already open

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when the shot was fired. If he was trying to get out, you'd expect the bullet to enter the back of his head rather than his temple. Apart from that, which, admittedly is not conclusive — well, why not the door? And there's a telephone in the room. Help at hand if he'd any warning that he might need it. No, I don't make much of your escape theory, Jimmy."

"Maybe you've a better one?"

"I wish I had! A winter's night. A man with a cold. Standing by an open window. Presumably deep in a quarrel which led to his death. I can't see rhyme or reason in it. It intrigues me. So does the fire. Was anything burned on it?"

"Something, yes. We haven't had time yet to decide what it was."

"Can I see the ashes?"

"Through here. We collected them for further examination."

Jamieson led the way into the dining-room, and lifted the lid of a box which lay on a table. Peter's dark eyebrows contracted as he studied its contents.

"Been pretty well stirred up," he muttered. "You weren't intended to learn much from this little lot." He poked a cautious finger among the debris. "A bit of charred leather. Nothing that looks like the remains of documents or letters. Wait a minute! What have we here? A fragment of cardboard, isn't it? And here's some more that hasn't been completely burned. Oh, and look, Jimmy!" He bent lower over the table. "This bit of ash. Can't you see writing on it?"

"I can see something."

"Try my magnifying glass."

"Yes, it does look like smudged writing. But —"

"Reversed?"

"Sure! That's it!"

"Blotting-paper. Together with leather and cardboard. Find out if Kincaird possessed a leather-bound blotter, will you?"

Jamieson hurried out. He was back in a few minutes.

"A chambermaid says," he reported, "that there was one on the writing-table in the lounge when she cleaned the room yesterday."

"And it isn't there now?"

"No."

"Then I think we're justified in assuming that that's that."

Peter strolled back into the lounge, and stood looking down at the writing-table. It had pigeonholes for stationery, a flat leather-covered top, and two drawers beneath.

"The chambermaid did her stuff well," he commented. "No trace of dust outlining the position of the blotter."

He crushed out his cigarette in an ashtray, and tried the drawers.

"They were locked, Mr. Trevor."

"Yes? I'm wondering if we're justified in assuming something else. It would explain a point that's been troubling me." He whistled a few bars of *Comin' Thro' the Rye*. "Why should anyone burn a blotter?" he demanded suddenly. "Not just the paper from it, mind you, but the whole caboodle?"

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"You tell me," muttered Jamieson.

"I'll try. I've been a bit worried about the comparative absence of blood. Even though Kincaird died instantly, there must have been a certain amount of bleeding from his wounds in his head. The condition of his face proves that. And even though his hand was cut off after death there must have been some oozing from the stump. Where did the blood go? Not on the carpet. Nor on the linoleum."

"Gosh! I get you! It was on the blotter."

"Suppose it was. Did the murderer deliberately put this under Kincaird's head to catch any blood?"

"Why should he?"

"There you've got me. I can't imagine why he should be so neat and and tidy. Still, supposing he did, why burn the blotter afterwards?"

For reply, Jamieson produced another cigarette. Peter took it, and inhaled deeply.

"Thanks. Seems to me there's only one possible answer. The fire was lit for no other purpose than to destroy the blotter. The murderer didn't want us to discover the blood on it."

"What difference could that make?"

"I'm groping in the dark, Jimmy. I can't believe that the blotter was placed under Kincaird's head merely to prevent blood getting onto the carpet. Doesn't make sense. Here's another suggestion. If Kincaird was sitting at this writing-table when he was shot his head might very naturally fall forward onto the blotter."

"Sure! But —"

"And the burning was intended to prevent us from suspecting where he'd been shot."

Jamieson shrugged helplessly.

"Sounds reasonable enough," he admitted. "But why the hanky-panky? Why go to all that trouble to fool us? What did the murderer gain?"

"I wish I knew. Does the relative positions of the two men tell us anything?" Peter took a couple of paces away from the writing-table. These brought him to the end of a settee. "Yes, the bullet could still go out of the window. If I'm right, the murderer was sitting here when he fired, instead of standing over there. Does that give us any information?"

"If it does, I'm deaf."

"I don't hear anything very interesting myself. In fact, I'm stuck — deep in a Slough of Despond. Our man comes up here and shoots Kincaird for some reason unknown. He shifts the body from the writing-table for some reason unknown. He lights the fire and burns the bloodstained blotter in the hope of fooling us — for some reason unknown. Then, before leaving, he cuts off the dead man's hand for some reason unknown. Utterly and completely impossible! Yet you've the nerve to expect me to solve such a puzzle."

Jamieson's dour features softened into a smile.

"You know you love doing it, Mr. Trevor."

"Think so?" Peter adjusted his cuffs and dropped onto the settee, smoking furiously. "I'm not feeling

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particularly affectionate at the moment. Trouble is we're getting nowhere, Jimmy; merely tying ourselves in knots. Let's try some other angle, and see if we can find a point of convergence. Any ideas about motive?" He glanced round the room. "Kincaird was evidently a wealthy man."

"I've not been able to pick up anything definite. The folks here know little or nothing about him. I phoned his night club, the Golden Bar, and had a word with the manager, a chap called Blount. Nothing there, either. Blount's never heard of any relative. He says Kincaird was a peculiar sort of bloke who made neither friends nor enemies."

"That's not strictly accurate, obviously. A casual acquaintance might shoot you; he'd hardly cut off your hand. Did you discover whether Kincaird really had a cold?"

"Blount says so. According to him, they were going over some accounts together early in the evening. About half-past seven Kincaird said he felt rotten, and would go home to bed. He told Blount to carry on at the club."

"Fits in. No disgruntled employees?"

"According to Blount, no."

"No one in the building here with a grudge against him?"

"The manager says not."

"Helpful, aren't you, Jimmy?"

"I've a notion of my own," ventured Jamieson diffidently.

"Go on, man! I'm wide open for notions."

"We found some I.O.U.'s in that right-hand drawer; for pretty big amounts. There hasn't been time to check up on them yet, so I don't know whether there's been gambling for high stakes at the Golden Bar, or whether Kincaird's been lending money as a sideline. Anyhow, it struck me that there might be a motive for murder here."

"The murderer owed Kincaird money, you mean, and was being dunned for payment? He came last night to plead for time, was refused, turned nasty, and did his stuff?"

"Something like that."

"Not a bad notion at all, Jimmy. But it doesn't get us anywhere, does it? If the murderer had time to light fires and so on, he'd time to find his own I.O.U. and destroy it, locking the drawer behind him — again to throw us off the scent. You've found no record of Kincaird's financial transactions?"

"No."

"He wouldn't be likely to keep one. Though a clever accountant might be able to dig something out of his pass book and check book. Won't prove anything, I'm afraid. No. The motive angle doesn't seem to give us a line. What about the Hand of Glory?"

"What about it, Mr. Trevor?"

"All I can tell you is this. Kincaird's hand was cut off some time after death by someone with no anatomical knowledge. The instrument used was not particularly sharp; probably an ordinary penknife. Those are the facts. Now for theories."

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Jamieson shook his grizzled head.

"I can only think the man was mad," he muttered.

"I don't agree. Whoever burned that bloodstained blotter had all his wits about him."

"Some kind of revenge, perhaps?"

"What satisfaction could any sane individual get from cutting off a dead man's hand? And don't forget that he took it away with him."

"Sounds as though you're hinting at that old superstition."

"We've got to keep it in mind, haven't we? Though I admit I don't attach too much importance to it. But it offers the only logical explanation for this amateur surgery we've struck so far. And I can't even imagine many more."

"Beats me altogether."

"Surely not. Suppose for some reason the murderer wished Kincaird's fingerprints to be found on some heavy object — say, a safe."

"Shades of Bruce! Where do you get such ideas?"

"They come — and go. I don't make much of that one; the forgery would almost certainly be discovered. A more likely possibility is a question of identification. For instance, Kincaird might have had a birthmark or something of the sort on his hand. If we'd found this, it might have told us that he'd been impersonating someone else, hiding his real identity."

"Gosh! That's worth following up!" exclaimed Jamieson. "Maybe you've solved the problem. Who'd be the likeliest person to know about any physical peculiarity? Blount, eh? And he's got a perfect alibi for the murder. Safe enough to ask him?"

"Why not?" agreed Peter.

His tuneless whistle — *Annie Laurie* again — provided an obligato to Jamieson's one-sided conversation on the telephone.

"Nothing doing?" he asked when it was concluded.

"No."

"Then I'm afraid I'm a broken reed, Jimmy. You're up against a very baffling case, and at the moment I can't offer you a single worthwhile suggestion or idea. Unless the post-mortem tells us anything. Shall we have the body moved?"

"Very well, Mr. Trevor."

Two constables brought in a stretcher, lifted Eric Kincaird onto it, and carried him out. Peter watched in brooding silence, his heavy eyebrows bunched together in a sullen frown. Suddenly a spark of excitement lit up in his dark eyes. Careless of the knife-edged crease in his trousers, he dropped on his knees again.

"Look at this, Jimmy!"

The body had been lying obliquely across the edge of the carpet, its legs towards the window. Its removal had disclosed something on the highly polished surface of the linoleum surrounding it.

Jamieson stooped to inspect the faint, barely perceptible marking.

"A footprint?" he enquired.

"Yes. You'll see it best if you get the light behind it. Come round here. That's right. Quite clear, isn't it, al-

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though so faint? Pointing away from the window. And it was *under* the body!"

"So what? Might have been made anytime."

"Are there any more about?"

"Don't think so. No."

"The room was cleaned yesterday. The chambermaid, as we've already noted, did her job thoroughly. This linoleum's a credit to any housewife. Would she miss just one footprint?"

"'Tisn't likely."

"Very well, then. Made since she cleaned up, and before Kincaird's body fell here. By a man. Rubber soles — you can see the pattern quite distinctly. Kincaird doesn't wear them. Who does?"

"The murderer?"

"Sure. Better have this print photographed at once. There's a definite fault in the pattern near the ball of the great toe. Obviously due to a curiously shaped cut in the rubber. Might very well serve to identify your man."

Jamieson was not impressed.

"We're getting places now!" he muttered. "Just line up the male population of London and examine their shoes!"

Peter did not reply. He was rummaging in his pockets, snapping his fingers irritably. When a cigarette was placed between his lips and lighted, he inhaled deeply.

"Thanks. Mustn't let me smoke all yours." He sat back on his heels, whistling something remotely recognizable as *Loch Lomond*. "I'm puzzled, Jimmy," he confessed, after a while. "Although it's so faint, this print is far too complete and clear to have been made by a dry shoe. The murderer's soles weren't muddy; but unquestionably they were damp. My recollection is that last night was clear and frosty."

"So is mine. I took the dog out about eleven. Beautiful."

"Then how did the murderer get his shoes wet?"

"Couldn't be blood, of course?"

"No. Just water; and not too much of that." Peter rose to his feet, carefully straightening his trousers. "Puzzling — and important. We must make quite certain about this; it may give us the line we're wanting. Who can tell us if there was any rain at all last night? Air Ministry?"

"Yes. They keep records. I'll ring them."

Jamieson went to the phone and put through his call. After a short delay, he received the desired information.

"There was a short sharp shower," he reported, "five minutes before midnight."

"Midnight?"

"That's what they say. The only rain in the last twenty-four hours."

"Surprising. Takes some thinking out. Let's see what we can do about it."

Peter dropped onto the settee, heavy brows bunched in concentration. The cigarette smouldered away unnoticed between his fingers. *Loch Lomond* was followed by *Annie Laurie* and *Mary of Argyll*, while

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Jamieson's dour features grew steadily grimmer.

"So that print was made about midnight, Mr. Trevor?" he ventured when he could stand no more of it.

"Yes," agreed Peter absently.

"Whoever made it came in by the fire-escape, or his shoes would have dried on the carpets?"

"Unquestionably."

"And Kincaird's body wasn't lying there then, or he couldn't have made it?"

"No arguing against that."

Jamieson cleared his throat apologetically.

"Then doesn't it seem that we're wrong about the time of the murder?"

"Tut-tut, Jimmy! As though both Doctor Grant and I could be mistaken! No, we're not wrong about the time of the murder. Kincaird was shot at nine all right."

"Then how do you account—"

"The murderer came back."

"He did — what?"

"And the fact that he came back alters everything. It makes the case comparatively simple and straightforward. It shows, for instance, that we were wrong about the time when he did the other things."

"Now you're talking riddles."

"Sorry. Just thinking aloud. Here it is in plain language. After shooting Kincaird, our man left by the fire-escape. He wouldn't want to risk being seen leaving the flat. Understandable?"

"Yes."

"For the same reason, when he returned, he came in by the fire-escape, making this footprint which is going to hang him. Clearly it was on this second visit, around midnight, that he moved the body, cut off the hand, and burned the blotter."

"And that's quite understandable, too," muttered Jamieson with heavy sarcasm. "As you say, everything's simple and straightforward now, thanks to your deductions." He lost his temper a little. "You've just made the whole business a damned sight more complicated, Mr. Trevor! Why should anyone take the risk of coming back to act the fool in that way?"

Peter laughed outright. "Don't you know, Jimmy?"

"All I know is what I've been told; that I can identify him — and hang him — by a cut in his rubber sole."

"Oh, I daresay you'll have more than that to go on. I'm pretty sure he used a penknife to cut off Kincaird's hand. He'll have cleaned it, of course, but it's very difficult to get every trace of blood from the thumb-nick and hinge of an ordinary penknife. The evidence will be circumstantial; but you'll get him all right."

"If you say so —"

"I do. I'm satisfied that there's only one logical explanation for all that has happened here." Peter rose from the settee, carefully brushing cigarette ash from his clothes. "We've work to do, Jimmy, and we ought to get busy at once. Will you ring up the Yard? I've an idea someone reported the loss of a revolver last night."

Jamieson stared for a moment, then

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obeyed. He was busy at the phone for quite a while, taking notes of what he was told. When he hung up, his eyes were wide with wonder.

"Witchcraft!" he muttered, turning to stare at Peter again. "I suppose you know who lost a revolver?"

"I do not."

"Then for once I can tell you something. At nine-thirty-three last night, a Mr. Simon Pollitt dialed 999 to say that he'd been attacked and robbed in his own home. A patrol car was wirelessed, and arrived at his house in Grays Inn Road within two minutes."

"Quick work," approved Peter.

"There are some things we *can* do at the Yard, Mr. Trevor. Though even so, our men were too late to do more than take Pollitt's statement. He's a diamond merchant, a bachelor living alone in an old detached house, with a woman coming in each day to look after the place. When he got home about eight-thirty, he heard vague sounds upstairs, as though someone were furtively moving about. Knowing that the woman would have left long ago, he at once thought of burglars. There's a safe in his bedroom which sometimes contains precious stones, though at present it was empty. Also in his bedroom, in the drawer of a bedside table, was a revolver. Without switching on any lights he crept quietly upstairs to get this."

"He'll have a license for the gun, of course?"

"Oh, yes, that's all in order. As a matter of fact, his license covers two. He keeps one at home, one at his office in Hatton Garden."

"Full details noted when the license was issued?"

"Naturally." Jamieson referred to his notes. "They're both .32 Colts, bought at the same time, with consecutive serial numbers. About the right size for Kincaird's wounds, eh?"

"Definitely. Go on."

"Well, almost as soon as he'd grabbed the revolver, someone jumped on him. In the darkness he never even caught a glimpse of his assailant. There was a pretty hefty scrap, during which the revolver was accidentally fired before being wrenched from his hand. Then he received a blow on the head which knocked him out."

"Unconscious?"

"Completely. When he recovered he was lying on the bedroom floor, still in darkness. It took him a while to pull himself together. When he did manage to get to his feet and switch on the light, he found that he'd been unconscious the best part of an hour. The burglar had vanished, taking with him the revolver and Pollitt's wallet which contained personal papers and a good deal of money. Pollitt called the Yard as soon as he could get down to the phone."

"No worse for his adventure, I hope?"

"Shaken a bit, and a nasty bruise on the head; that's all. Our men found an open window in the kitchen. They also found the revolver bullet in the bedroom, buried in a wardrobe. But there were no fingerprints, or any clues to the burglar's identity. And as

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Pollitt couldn't give them a description, they haven't much chance of getting on the fellow's track."

Jamieson shut his notebook with a snap.

"Disappointing, isn't it? I haven't the foggiest notion how your mind's working except that you're pretty sure Kincaird was shot with this stolen revolver. If so, we want that burglar — badly. And I'm hanged if I know how we're going to set about getting him. Any more brainwaves, Mr. Trevor?"

Peter did not reply. He was swaying gently on his feet, dark eyes dreamy, lips pursed to the familiar tuneless whistle. Jamieson glowered at him.

"Mr. Trevor!" he repeated sharply.

"Sorry, Jimmy! Afraid I was wool gathering. Listen! Has the Press got wind of Kincaird's death yet?"

"Lord, yes! The reporters were here almost as soon as I was."

"Then there'll be some account of the Hand of Glory in the mid-day editions."

"Sure to be. Why?"

"I think we'd better go to Mr. Simon Pollitt's office," said Peter. "I've an idea we might be in time to prevent another murder. Got a cigarette?" He absently held out his hand. "Better not let anyone know where we're going. And we'll take a couple of your men with us in case of trouble."

Jamieson gasped. But he had worked with Peter Trevor too frequently to argue or even to hesitate. After giving directions for the footprint on the linoleum to be photographed, he beckoned two plain-clothes men to follow, led the way into the service lift, and sneaked out of Avondale Court by the staff entrance, thus avoiding reporters.

The police car sped swiftly to Hatton Garden, depositing its load at the building in which Pollitt's offices were situated. Leaving the two plain-clothesmen outside with instructions to efface themselves, Jamieson and Peter ascended the stairs. They entered a small outer office, occupied by a lanky freckled youth who informed them that Mr. Pollitt had just gone out to lunch.

"We'll wait," said Peter, hitching up his trousers and sitting down.

The lanky youth fidgeted uncomfortably.

"Dunno about that, sir," he said. "Mr. Pollitt's given me the afternoon off. Said I could lock up and go as soon as I'd finished this ledger."

"We'll wait." Jamieson disclosed his identity. "No need for you to hang around. We'll take care of the office until Mr. Pollitt returns."

Overawed, the youth completed his bookkeeping, reached his hat from behind the door, and departed.

As soon as he had gone, Peter rose.

"We're hitting the nail on the head, Jimmy," he remarked cheerfully. "Freckleface gets the afternoon off because Pollitt is more than half expecting an important visitor. Lend me your skeletons, will you, and keep guard at the door? If your scruples will allow it I'd like a look inside his private office."

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Jamieson handed over the keys and retreated to the outer door, listening, watching uneasily while Peter attacked the lock of the inner office. This was soon opened. He slipped through, returning almost immediately with a revolver.

"Another nail," he commented. "Found it in the top drawer of his desk."

"So what? We knew he'd got one."

"Fully loaded. But someone's been rather careless. Smell at the barrel. Been fired quite recently, don't you think? Ought to have been cleaned before it was put back."

"I wish I knew what you're getting at, Mr. Trevor."

"You will," said Peter, dropping the revolver into his pocket. "May have quite a while to wait. I could do with a smoke. Thanks. Must remember to buy some when we go out."

He sat down again. Except for the mangled strains of *Loch Lomond*, the dingy little room was silent.

Time dragged slowly past, bringing to the office an atmosphere of tension which was strangely heightened by the intermittent tuneless whistle. The building had become unusually quiet. Only an occasional footstep sounded in the corridors. Even the roar of traffic outside seemed muffled.

Both men started a little at the unheralded knock on the outer door. Taut and alert, Jamieson sprang from his chair.

"Come in!" he called.

When the door opened to admit an undersized ginger-haired little man with weak watery eyes, an almost ludicrous surprise showed on his tense features.

"Well, if it isn't Slippy Bingham!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here, Slippy?"

The little man blinked. He was very frightened indeed.

"Sorry if I — I've butted in, Inspector," he faltered. "I — I didn't know — I just wanted a word with Mr. Pollitt."

Peter gave him a friendly smile, and rose leisurely to his feet.

"On your records, Jimmy?" he enquired.

"Yes."

"A pickpocket?"

"One of the cleverest — But how in Hades do you know?"

"He had to be. It was the only thing that would fit in. He's the visitor Pollitt is half expecting." Peter turned back to the little man and his smile faded. "You may be a good pickpocket, Mr. Bingham," he said severely. "But you're making a very bad start as a blackmailer."

"I — I dunno what yer mean, guv'ner."

"Oh, yes, you do! Last night, just after nine o'clock, you picked a man's pocket. Somewhere near Avondale Court, wasn't it? Why you troubled to lift a revolver I don't know, unless it was that you couldn't conveniently slide the wallet out without taking the gun as well. Anyhow, you got them both, and your curiosity was roused by the fact that

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he revolver had been fired recently. The documents in the wallet, of course, told you who its owner was. And when you saw in the papers just now that someone had been shot at Avondale Court, you decided to come along and see whether Mr. Pollitt would be prepared to pay a suitable amount for the return of his gun."

"No, no, guv'ner! I —"

"A very foolish action, Mr. Bingham. I really believe we've saved your life by getting here before you. I'm quite sure Mr. Pollitt is in no mood for trifling. After all his scheming, he wouldn't hesitate at another murder to ensure his safety. And he'd a gun waiting for you — just like the one you pinched. Look! Here it is!"

Slippy Bingham stared speechlessly at the revolver in Peter's hand. His throat moved convulsively as he tried to swallow. Jamieson seized his arm and shook him violently.

"You damn fool, Slippy! Why didn't you hand the gun over to us? You've let yourself in for something real this time. Compounding a felony and —"

The little man broke.

"I'll tell yer where it is, Inspector," he whined. "The wallet as well. I'll tell yer everythin' and 'elp yer all I can if yer'll make it easy fer me."

"Send one of your men with him, Jimmy," suggested Peter. "We'd better wait here and knock the final nail into Pollitt's coffin."

Jamieson hurried Slippy Bingham from the office. When he returned a few minutes later, his dour features expressed a curious mixture of bewilderment and admiration.

"You've done it again, Mr. Trevor," he said, offering a cigarette. "And I'm still in a whirl. Before long I'm going to arrest a man I've never seen, and who had no apparent connection with the case. If it isn't asking too much, I'd like to know just how I got on his track."

Peter smiled. "The Hand of Glory pointed the way." He took a few paces round the little office, puffing at the cigarette. "As soon as I realized that the murderer had come back to cut off Kincaird's hand, everything was clear."

"So you said before. I didn't believe you then. I still don't."

"Well, let's start at the beginning. You'll have to ferret out the question of motive for yourself; though your original notion of the murderer being dunned to desperation for payment of an I.O.U. fits in perfectly. Anyhow, Pollitt shot Kincaird at the writing-table, and cleared off by the fire-escape as we've already deduced. He'd left no clues behind him, and must have considered himself perfectly safe.

"But an unexpected and most unfortunate thing happened. Before he got home, he discovered that his pocket had been picked. His wallet had gone; and — more important — the revolver with which he had just committed murder. See what a mess he was in? The gun could easily be traced to him. The bullet that had

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killed Kincaird was still in the lounge with the dead man — no, it hadn't gone out of the window, Jimmy, though we were intended to think so — and if the revolver fell into the hands of the police, they were almost certain to make tests which would prove that it had fired the fatal bullet.

"So he had to do some quick thinking. Clearly, there were two alternatives to be faced. The pick-pocket might throw the gun away; in which case it would probably go direct to the police. Or he might decide to act as our friend Slippy Bingham has, in fact, acted. In either event, Pollitt realized that the first essential was to persuade the police that the revolver had already passed out of his possession at the time the murder was committed.

"No use waiting until enquiries were made, then telling some sort of tale about how he had lost the gun. If he got his story in first, before Kincaird's death was discovered, it was much more likely to carry conviction. Moreover, if he could embroider it with appropriate violence it would fit in all the better with the impression he wished to create.

"I think he put up a pretty good show in the circumstances. He called here for his second revolver, hurried home and at once staged his phony little drama. Quite cunning, wasn't it? With a hefty bump on the head, who was likely to disbelieve his statement that he'd been unconscious the best part of an hour? This served a double purpose. It fooled the police into believing that his revolver was stolen about half-past eight. It also gave him an excellent alibi for nine o'clock, the time of the murder. He really ought to have cleaned the gun when he brought it back here this morning, but I suppose he thought his subterfuge would never be suspected. Now we've tumbled to it, you'll be able to prove that the bullet in his wardrobe was fired from the revolver I found here in his desk.

"As I say, a pretty good show. If he'd been content to leave it at that, I doubt whether you'd ever have got him. But he had another brainwave. If he —"

Peter broke off as firm footsteps in the corridor outside approached the door.

"Sounds like Mr. Pollitt," he murmured.

A key rattled in the latch and a man entered the office, stopping short in surprise at sight of its occupants. He was tall and gaunt, with a cross of sticking-plaster on his forehead.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

Jamieson moved towards him.

"Mr. Simon Pollitt?" he enquired.

"Yes."

It was a very quiet and uneventful arrest. Shocked by the unexpectedness of it, Pollitt did not speak again. He seemed dazed. He listened without comprehension to what Jamieson had to say. He failed to understand the interest shown in the curiously shaped cut in one of his rubber soles, though

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he must have realized the significance of Peter's close scrutiny of his penknife. Confronted with the revolver from his desk, he nodded dully, then quietly accompanied his captor downstairs.

When Jamieson returned, Peter was watching tiny bubbles form in the hinge of the penknife which he had just touched with a drop of reagent.

"It's blood all right, Jimmy," he said.

"Then I've got him, Mr. Trevor. And I still don't quite know how I've managed it. You were telling me something about another brainwave."

"Yes. It wasn't a bad idea, either, though it did lead to his downfall. It occurred to him that if he recovered the bullet which killed Kincaird he'd be doubly safe, because there'd then be nothing to connect his gun in any way with the murder. He could laugh at the police — and defy anyone who tried to blackmail him. The situation was tempting. He knew that Kincaird's death would not be discovered until morning; and the window to the fire-escape was open. With ordinary care he ran practically no risk in going back.

"Soon after midnight, accordingly, he entered Kincaird's lounge again in search of the bullet. He hadn't noticed earlier on what happened to it. Who would? Now he made a rather troublesome discovery. Kincaird had been studying a document at the moment of his death — which supports your notion of the I.O.U. In a very natural position, his right elbow had been resting on the writing-table, his head against his right hand. Pollitt found that the bullet, after penetrating the head, had lodged in the hand."

Jamieson swore vigorously. "So that's it!"

"That's it, Jimmy. Really quite simple after all, eh? How to remove the bullet? Merely to cut it out of the hand wouldn't do at all; the reason would be so obvious. The police would guess at once that the murderer didn't want his bullet matching with a gun which must already be more or less in their possession, and they'd quickly put two and two together. So Pollitt had to scheme some more. He decided eventually to cut off the offending hand completely, to shift Kincaird's body to the open window to account for the missing bullet, and to destroy any evidence indicating that death had occurred elsewhere.

"When he left, he took the Hand of Glory with him. What he did with it, Heaven only knows. I'm pretty sure you'll never find it. But that doesn't matter much. With Slippy Bingham's evidence, I think what we've dug up will be enough to hang him."

"It certainly will, Mr. Trevor!" Jamieson grinned widely. "And next time I have a case like this, I'll know just how to handle it."

"Good! Got a cigarette?" Peter straightened his tie and adjusted his hat to the right angle. "Remind me to buy some when we get out."

A perfect rendering of *The Campbells Are Comin'* accompanied them from the room and down the stairs.

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It is not generally known that Charles Dickens wrote at least one straight detective short story. The four police articles which first appeared in 1850 in his own magazine, "Household Words," were basically non-fiction — that is, they were founded on the true experiences of Dickens's friends among the plainclothes detectives of his time — the embryo of the present C.I.D. But in 1859 Dickens produced a short story called "Hunted Down" and this powerful tale is straight detection by any standards, even those dogmatized by the purest purists. True, the character who plays the role of detective in "Hunted Down" cannot be claimed by the modern school: he is not a dilettante or scientist whose forte is deduction; nor is he the tough hombre of the hardboiled species; yet in motives and actions, as you will see, he is undeniably a realistic detective.

"Hunted Down" has an unusually interesting bibliographic history. It was the first and only story that Charles Dickens ever wrote for an American periodical — or, as the English phrased it, "for a foreign newspaper proprietor." The story was commissioned by, and written exclusively for, Robert Bonner, editor and owner of "The New York Ledger." It appeared in the August 20, 27, and September 3, 1859 issues, as a three-part serial, and Mr. Bonner paid Dickens 1000 guineas — a fat price for a single short story then and now. In 1860 Dickens reprinted the tale in another of his own English magazines, "All the Year Round," issues of April 4 and 11. Ten years later it was reprinted again, on Christmas Day, in the "Piccadilly Annual," London, 1870.

For a long time it was believed that "Hunted Down" did not appear in book form until 1870, when John Camden Hotten of London brought out a small, paperback booklet that sold for sixpence. Then John C. Eckel, the outstanding Dickens bibliographer, announced a signal discovery: he placed the first book appearance of "Hunted Down" a full nine years ahead of the Hotten publication — in the contents of T. B. Peterson edition of THE LAMPLIGHTER'S STORY, *published in Philadelphia in 1861.*

But even the foremost authority on books by Dickens can be wrong. It will come as a shock to Dickens collectors to learn that the Peterson book is merely the first American edition of "Hunted Down," as the Hotten booklet is merely the first English edition. The honor of publishing the true *first edition (Mr. Eckel and all other experts to the contrary) belongs neither to an American nor to an English publisher: true priority is the possession of a German publisher, Bernhard Tauchnitz of Leipzig, whose in-English*

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edition of "Hunted Down" clearly shows 1860 on the title-page.

All of which may seem like "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Who cares which edition came first? Only a few bibliomaniacs, including Your Most Humble Servant. To quote again from Shakespeare, who understood all things, "the play's the thing" — wherein to catch the conscience of the Queen. And it is Queen's conscience that dictates the editorial policy of EQMM: to make available to you at all times the very best detective short stories, new and old — and for this reason alone, forgetting all folderol about first editions, we now bring you "Hunted Down," complete except for the deletion of the author's own short introduction.

Every new generation of readers should adventure back into the work of Charles Dickens. The great English master — and he was that — had the quaint ability to transform cold words and phrases into warm flesh and blood. Sometimes your Editor believes that if you faced the pages of Dickens with a mirror, you could actually see the glass cloud up with the breath of Dickens's characters, so living and alive they seem. Even in "Hunted Down" — a minor effort compared with Dickens's masterpieces — you soon realize that you are eavesdropping on real people, however enmeshed they may be in Victorian melodrama.

One final comment: it is, we think, peculiarly fitting to include a story by Charles Dickens in this, our Christmas issue. No writer in all the history of literature has become so closely associated with the spirit of "Christmas stories" as has Charles Dickens. And that is true whether Christmas stories are merely those of sentiment and good cheer, of the natural or the supernatural — or of detection. For, in the larger sense, isn't every story of crime and punishment a Christmas parable? When a cruel and crafty murder is avenged, when justice triumphs, when good conquers evil, surely that is a step in the right direction — toward peace on earth, good will toward men. And no writer understood more deeply than Charles Dickens the meaning of good will toward man — even in his detective stories.

HUNTED DOWN

by CHARLES DICKENS

THE partition which separated my own office from our general outer office in the City was of thick plate-glass. I could see through it what passed in the outer office, without hearing a word. I had it put up in place of a wall that had been there for years — ever since the house was

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built. It is no matter whether I did or did not make the change in order that I might derive my first impression of strangers, who came to us on business, from their faces alone, without being influenced by anything they said. Enough to mention that I turned my glass partition to that account, and that a Life Assurance Office is at all times exposed to be practised upon by the most crafty and cruel of the human race.

It was through my glass partition that I first saw the gentleman whose story I am going to tell.

He had come in without my observing it, and had put his hat and umbrella on the broad counter, and was bending over it to take some papers from one of the clerks. He was about forty or so, dark, exceedingly well dressed in black — being in mourning — and the hand he extended with a polite air, had a particularly well-fitting black kid glove upon it. His hair, which was elaborately brushed and oiled, was parted straight up the middle; and he presented this parting to the clerk, exactly (to my thinking) as if he had said, in so many words: "You must take me, if you please, my friend, just as I show myself. Come straight up here, follow the gravel path, keep off the grass, I allow no trespassing."

I conceived a very great aversion to that man the moment I thus saw him.

He had asked for some of our printed forms, and the clerk was giving them to him and explaining them. An obliged and agreeable smile was on his face, and his eyes met those of the clerk with a sprightly look. (I have known a vast quantity of nonsense talked about bad men not looking you in the face. Don't trust that conventional idea. Dishonesty will stare honesty out of countenance, any day in the week, if there is anything to be got by it.)

I saw, in the corner of his eyelash, that he became aware of my looking at him. Immediately he turned the parting in his hair toward the glass partition, as if he said to me with a sweet smile, "Straight up here, if you please. Off the grass!"

In a few moments he had put on his hat and taken up his umbrella, and was gone.

I beckoned the clerk into my room, and asked, "Who was that?"

He had the gentleman's card in his hand. "Mr. Julius Slinkton, Middle Temple."

"A barrister, Mr. Adams?"

"I think not, sir."

"I should have thought him a clergyman, but for his having no Reverend here," said I.

"Probably, from his appearance," Mr. Adams replied, " he is reading for orders."

I should mention that he wore a dainty white cravat, and dainty linen altogether.

"What did he want, Mr. Adams?"

"Merely a form of proposal, sir, and form of reference."

"Recommended here? Did he say?"

"Yes, he said he was recommended here by a friend of yours. He noticed

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ou, but said that as he had not the leasure of your personal acquaintance e would not trouble you."

"Did he know my name?"

"Oh, yes, sir! He said, 'There *is* Mr. Sampson, I see!' "

"A well-spoken gentleman, apparntly?"

"Remarkably so, sir."

"Insinuating manners, apparntly?"

"Very much so, indeed, sir."

"Hah!" said I. "I want nothing at present, Mr. Adams."

Within a fortnight of that day I went to dine with a friend of mine, a merchant, a man of taste, who buys pictures and books, and the first man I saw among the company was Mr. Julius Slinkton. There he was, standing before the fire, with good large eyes and an open expression of face; but still (I thought) requiring everybody to come at him by the prepared way he offered, and by no other.

I noticed him ask my friend to introduce him to Mr. Sampson, and my friend did so. Mr. Slinkton was very happy to see me. Not too happy; there was no over-doing of the matter; happy in a thoroughly well-bred, perfectly unmeaning way.

"I thought you had met," our host observed.

"No," said Mr. Slinkton. "I did look in at Mr. Sampson's office, on your recommendation; but I really did not feel justified in troubling Mr. Sampson himself, on a point in the everyday routine of a clerk."

I said I should have been glad to show him any attention on our friend's introduction.

"I am sure of that," said he, "and am much obliged. At another time, perhaps, I may be less delicate. Only, however, if I have real business; for I know, Mr. Sampson, how precious business time is, and what a vast number of impertinent people there are in the world."

I acknowledged his consideration with a slight bow. "You were thinking," said I, "of effecting a policy on your life."

"Oh dear no! I am afraid I am not so prudent as you pay me the compliment of supposing me to be, Mr. Sampson. I merely inquired for a friend. But you know what friends are in such matters. Nothing may ever come of it. I have the greatest reluctance to trouble men of business with inquiries for friends, knowing the probabilities to be a thousand to one that the friends will never follow them up. People are so fickle, so selfish, so inconsiderate. Don't you, in your business, find them so every day?"

I was going to give a qualified answer; but he turned his smooth, white parting on me with its "Straight up here, if you please!" and I answered "Yes."

"I hear, Mr. Sampson," he resumed presently, for our friend had a new cook, and dinner was not so punctual as usual, "that your profession has recently suffered a great loss."

"In money?" said I.

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"No, in talent and vigor."

Not at once following out his allusion, I considered for a moment. "*Has* it sustained a loss of that kind?" said I. "I was not aware of it."

"Understand me, Mr. Sampson. I don't imagine that you have retired. It is not so bad as that. But Mr. Meltham —"

"Oh, to be sure!" said I. "Yes! Mr. Meltham, the young actuary of the 'Inestimable.' "

"Just so," he returned in a consoling way.

"He is a great loss. He was at once the most profound, the most original, and the most energetic man I have ever known connected with Life Assurance."

I spoke strongly; for I had a high esteem and admiration for Meltham; and my gentleman had indefinitely conveyed to me some suspicion that he wanted to sneer at him. He recalled me to my guard by presenting that trim pathway up his head, with its infernal "Not on the grass, if you please — the gravel."

"You knew him, Mr. Slinkton?"

"Only by reputation. To have known him as an acquaintance or as a friend, is an honor I should have sought if he had remained in society, though I might never have had the good fortune to attain it, being a man of far inferior mark. He was scarcely above thirty, I suppose?"

"About thirty."

"Ah!" he sighed in his former consoling way. "What creatures we are! To break up, Mr. Sampson, and become incapable of business at tha time of life! — Any reason assigne for the melancholy fact?"

("Humph!" thought I, as I looke at him. "But I WON'T go up the track and I WILL go on the grass.")

"What reason have you heard as signed, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked, point blank.

"Most likely a false one. You knov what Rumor is, Mr. Sampson. I neve repeat what I hear; it is the only wa of paring the nails and shaving th head of Rumor. But when *you* ask m what reason I have heard assigned fo Mr. Meltham's passing away fron among men, it is another thing. I am not gratifying idle gossip then. I was told, Mr. Sampson, that Mr Meltham had relinquished all hi avocations and all his prospects, be cause he was, in fact, broken-hearted A disappointed attachment I heard — though it hardly seems probable, in the case of a man so distinguished and so attractive."

"Attractions and distinctions are no armor against death," said I.

"Oh, she died? Pray pardon me. I did not hear that. That, indeed, makes it very, very sad. Poor Mr. Meltham! Ah, dear me! Lamentable, lamentable!"

I still thought his pity was not quite genuine, and I still suspected an unaccountable sneer under all this, until he said, as we were parted, like the other knots of talkers, by the announcement of dinner:

"Mr. Sampson, you are surprised to see me so moved on behalf of a man

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whom I have never known. I am not so disinterested as you may suppose. I have suffered, and recently too, from death myself. I have lost one of two charming nieces, who were my constant companions. She died young — barely three-and-twenty; and even her remaining sister is far from strong. The world is a grave!"

He said this with deep feeling, and I felt reproached for the coldness of my manner. Coldness and distrust had been engendered in me, I knew, by my bad experiences; they were not natural to me; and I often thought how much I had lost in life, losing trustfulness, and how little I had gained, gaining hard caution. This state of mind being habitual to me, I troubled myself more about this conversation than I might have troubled myself about a greater matter. I listened to his talk at dinner, and observed how readily other men responded to it, and with what a graceful instinct he adapted his subjects to the knowledge and habits of those he talked with. As, in talking with me, he had easily started the subject I might be supposed to understand best, and to be the most interested in, so, in talking with others, he guided himself by the same rule. The company was of a varied character; but he was not at fault, that I could discover, with any member of it. He knew just as much of each man's pursuit as made him agreeable to that man in reference to it, and just as little as made it natural in him to seek modestly for information when the theme was broached.

As he talked and talked — but really not too much, for the rest of us seemed to force it upon him — I became quite angry with myself. I took his face to pieces in my mind, like a watch, and examined it in detail. I could not say much against any of his features separately; I could say even less against them when they were put together. "Then is it not monstrous," I asked myself, "that because a man happens to part his hair straight up the middle of his head, I should permit myself to suspect, and even to detest him?"

(I may stop to remark that this was no proof of my sense. An observer of men who finds himself steadily repelled by some apparently trifling thing in a stranger is right to give it great weight. It may be the clue to the whole mystery. A hair or two will show where a lion is hidden. A very little key will open a very heavy door.)

I took my part in the conversation with him after a time, and we got on remarkably well. In the drawing-room I asked the host how long he had known Mr. Slinkton. He answered, not many months; he had met him at the house of a celebrated painter then present, who had known him well when he was travelling with his nieces in Italy for their health. His plans in life being broken by the death of one of them, he was reading with the intention of going back to college as a matter of form, taking his degree, and going into orders. I could not but argue with myself that here

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was the true explanation of his interest in poor Meltham, and that I had been almost brutal in my distrust on that simple head.

On the very next day but one I was sitting behind my glass partition, as before, when he came into the outer office, as before. The moment I saw him again without hearing him, I hated him worse than ever.

It was only for a moment that I had this opportunity; for he waved his tight-fitting black glove the instant I looked at him, and came straight in.

"Mr. Sampson, good day! I presume, you see, upon your kind permission to intrude upon you. I don't keep my word in being justified by business, for my business here — if I may so abuse the word — is of the slightest nature."

I asked, was it anything I could assist him in?

"I thank you, no. I merely called to inquire outside whether my dilatory friend had been so false to himself as to be practical and sensible. But, of course, he has done nothing. I gave him your papers with my own hand, and he was hot upon the intention, but of course he has done nothing. Apart from the general human disinclination to do anything that ought to be done, I dare say there is a specialty about assuring one's life. You find it like will-making. People are so superstitious, and take it for granted they will die soon afterwards."

"Up here, if you please; straight up here, Mr. Sampson. Neither to the right nor to the left." I almost fancied I could hear him breathe the words as he sat smiling at me, with that intolerable parting exactly opposite the bridge of my nose.

"There is such a feeling sometimes, no doubt," I replied; "but I don't think it obtains to any great extent."

"Well," said he, with a shrug and a smile, "I wish some good angel would influence my friend in the right direction. I rashly promised his mother and sister in Norfolk to see it done, and he promised them that he would do it. But I suppose he never will."

He spoke for a minute or two on indifferent topics, and went away.

I had scarcely unlocked the drawers of my writing-table next morning, when he reappeared. I noticed that he came straight to the door in the glass partition, and did not pause a single moment outside.

"Can you spare me two minutes, my dear Mr. Sampson?"

"By all means."

"Much obliged," laying his hat and umbrella on the table; "I came early, not to interrupt you. The fact is, I am taken by surprise in reference to this proposal my friend has made."

"Has he made one?" said I.

"Ye-es," he answered, deliberately looking at me; and then a bright idea seemed to strike him — "or he only tells me he has. Perhaps that may be a new way of evading the matter. By Jupiter, I never thought of that!"

Mr. Adams was opening the morn-

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ng's letters in the outer office. "What s the name, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked.

"Beckwith."

I looked out at the door and requested Mr. Adams, if there were a proposal in that name, to bring it in. He had already laid it out of his hand on the counter. It was easily selected from the rest, and he gave it me. Alfred Beckwith. Proposal to effect a policy with us for two thousand pounds. Dated yesterday.

"From the Middle Temple, I see, Mr. Slinkton."

"Yes. He lives on the same staircase with me; his door is opposite. I never thought he would make me his reference though."

"It seems natural enough that he should."

"Quite so, Mr. Sampson; but I never thought of it. Let me see." He took the printed paper from his pocket. "How am I to answer all these questions?"

"According to the truth, of course," said I.

"Oh, of course!" he answered, looking up from the paper with a smile; "I meant they were so many. But you do right to be particular. It stands to reason that you must be particular. Will you allow me to use your pen and ink?"

"Certainly."

"And your desk?"

"Certainly."

He had been hovering about between his hat and his umbrella for a place to write on. He now sat down in my chair, at my blotting-paper and inkstand, with the long walk up his head in accurate perspective before me, as I stood with my back to the fire.

Before answering each question he ran over it aloud, and discussed it. How long had he known Mr. Alfred Beckwith? That he had to calculate by years upon his fingers. What were his habits? No difficulty about them; temperate in the last degree, and took a little too much exercise, if anything. All the answers were satisfactory. When he had written them all, he looked them over, and finally signed them in a very pretty hand. He supposed he had now done with the business. I told him he was not likely to be troubled any further. Should he leave the papers there? If he pleased. Much obliged. Good morning.

I had had one other visitor before him; not at the office, but at my own house. That visitor had come to my bedside when it was not yet daylight, and had been seen by no one else but my faithful confidential servant.

A second reference paper (for we required always two) was sent down into Norfolk, and was duly received back by post. This, likewise, was satisfactorily answered in every respect. Our forms were all complied with; we accepted the proposal, and the premium for one year was paid.

For six or seven months I saw no more of Mr. Slinkton. He called once at my house, but I was not at home; and he once asked me to dine with

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him in the Temple, but I was engaged. His friend's assurance was effected in March. Late in September or early in October I was down at Scarborough for a breath of sea-air, where I met him on the beach. It was a hot evening; he came toward me with his hat in his hand; and there was the walk I had felt so strongly disinclined to take in perfect order again, exactly in front of the bridge of my nose.

He was not alone, but had a young lady on his arm.

She was dressed in mourning, and I looked at her with great interest. She had the appearance of being extremely delicate, and her face was remarkably pale and melancholy; but she was very pretty. He introduced her as his niece, Miss Niner.

"Are you strolling, Mr. Sampson? Is it possible you can be idle?"

It *was* possible, and I *was* strolling.

"Shall we stroll together?"

"With pleasure."

The young lady walked between us, and we walked on the cool sea sand, in the direction of Filey.

"There have been wheels here," said Mr. Slinkton. "And now I look again, the wheels of a hand-carriage! Margaret, my love, your shadow without doubt!"

"Miss Niner's shadow?" I repeated, looking down at it on the sand.

"Not that one," Mr. Slinkton returned, laughing. "Margaret, my dear, tell Mr. Sampson."

"Indeed," said the young lady, turning to me, "there is nothing to tell — except that I constantly see the same invalid old gentleman at all times, wherever I go. I have mentioned it to my uncle, and he calls the gentleman my shadow."

"Does he live in Scarborough?" I asked.

"He is staying here."

"Do you live in Scarborough?"

"No, I am staying here. My uncle has placed me with a family here, for my health."

"And your shadow?" said I, smiling.

"My shadow," she answered, smiling too, "is — like myself — not very robust, I fear; for I lose my shadow sometimes, as my shadow loses me at other times. We both seem liable to confinement to the house. I have not seen my shadow for days and days; but it does oddly happen, occasionally, that wherever I go, for many days together, this gentleman goes. We have come together in the most unfrequented nooks on this shore."

"Is this he?" said I, pointing before us.

The wheels had swept down to the water's edge, and described a great loop on the sand in turning. Bringing the loop back towards us, and spinning it out as it came, was a hand-carriage, drawn by a man.

"Yes," said Miss Niner, "this really is my shadow, uncle."

As the carriage approached us and we approached the carriage, I saw within it an old man, whose head was sunk on his breast, and who was enveloped in a variety of wrappers. He was drawn by a very quiet but very keen-looking man, with iron-grey

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hair, who was slightly lame. They had passed us, when the carriage stopped, and the old gentleman within, putting out his arm, called to me by my name. I went back, and was absent from Mr. Slinkton and his niece for about five minutes.

When I rejoined them, Mr. Slinkton was the first to speak. Indeed, he said to me in a raised voice before I came up with him:

"It is well you have not been longer, or my niece might have died of curiosity to know who her shadow is, Mr. Sampson."

"An old East India Director," said I. "An intimate friend of our friend's, at whose house I first had the pleasure of meeting you. A certain Major Banks. You have heard of him?"

"Never."

"Very rich, Miss Niner; but very old, and very crippled. An amiable man, sensible — much interested in you. He has just been expatiating on the affection that he has observed to exist between you and your uncle."

Mr. Slinkton was holding his hat again, and he passed his hand up the straight walk, as if he himself went up it serenely, after me.

"Mr. Sampson," he said, tenderly pressing his niece's arm in his, "our affection was always a strong one, for we have had but few near ties. We have still fewer now. We have associations to bring us together, that are not of this world, Margaret."

"Dear uncle!" murmured the young lady, and turned her face aside to hide her tears.

"My niece and I have such remembrances and regrets in common, Mr. Sampson," he feelingly pursued, "that it would be strange indeed if the relations between us were cold or indifferent. If I remember a conversation we once had together, you will understand the reference I make. Cheer up, dear Margaret. Don't droop, don't droop. My Margaret! I cannot bear to see you droop!"

The poor young lady was very much affected, but controlled herself. His feelings, too, were very acute. In a word, he found himself under such great need of a restorative, that he presently went away, to take a bath of sea-water, leaving the young lady and me sitting by a point of rock, and probably presuming — but that you will say was a pardonable indulgence in a luxury — that she would praise him with all her heart.

She did, poor thing! With all her confiding heart, she praised him to me, for his care of her dead sister, and for his untiring devotion in her last illness. The sister had wasted away very slowly, and wild and terrible fantasies had come over her toward the end, but he had never been impatient with her, or at a loss; had always been gentle, watchful, and self-possessed. The sister had known him, as she had known him, to be the best of men, the kindest of men, and yet a man of such admirable strength of character, as to be a very tower for the support of their weak natures while their poor lives endured.

"I shall leave him, Mr. Sampson,

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very soon," said the young lady; "I know my life is drawing to an end; and when I am gone, I hope he will marry and be happy. I am sure he has lived single so long, only for my sake, and for my poor, poor sister's."

The little hand-carriage had made another great loop on the damp sand, and was coming back again, gradually spinning out a slim figure of eight, half a mile long.

"Young lady," said I, looking around, laying my hand upon her arm, and speaking in a low voice, "time presses. You hear the gentle murmur of that sea?"

She looked at me with the utmost wonder and alarm, saying,

"Yes!"

"And you know what a voice is in it when the storm comes?"

"Yes!"

"You see how quiet and peaceful it lies before us, and you know what an awful sight of power without pity it might be, this very night!"

"Yes!"

"But if you had never heard or seen it, or heard of it in its cruelty, could you believe that it beats every inanimate thing in its way to pieces, without mercy, and destroys life without remorse?"

"You terrify me, sir, by these questions!"

"To save you, young lady, to save you! For God's sake, collect your strength and collect your firmness! If you were here alone, and hemmed in by the rising tide on the flow to fifty feet above your head, you could not be in greater danger than the danger you are now to be saved from."

The figure on the sand was spun out, and straggled off into a crooked little jerk that ended at the cliff very near us.

"As I am, before Heaven and the Judge of all mankind, your friend, and your dead sister's friend, I solemnly entreat you, Miss Niner, without one moment's loss of time, to come to this gentleman with me!"

If the little carriage had been less near to us, I doubt if I could have got her away; but it was so near that we were there before she had recovered the hurry of being urged from the rock. I did not remain there with her two minutes. Certainly within five, I had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing her — from the point we had sat on, and to which I had returned — half supported and half carried up some rude steps notched in the cliff, by the figure of an active man. With that figure beside her, I knew she was safe anywhere.

I sat alone on the rock, awaiting Mr. Slinkton's return. The twilight was deepening and the shadows were heavy, when he came round the point, with his hat hanging at his button-hole, smoothing his wet hair with one of his hands, and picking out the old path with the other and a pocket-comb.

"My niece not here, Mr. Sampson?" he said, looking about.

"Miss Niner seemed to feel a chill in the air after the sun was down, and has gone home."

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He looked surprised, as though she were not accustomed to do anything without him.

"I persuaded Miss Niner," I explained.

"Ah!" said he. "She is easily persuaded — for her good. Thank you, Mr. Sampson; she is better within doors. The bathing-place was farther than I thought, to say the truth."

"Miss Niner is very delicate," I observed.

He shook his head and drew a deep sigh. "Very, very, very. You may recollect my saying so. The time that has since intervened has not strengthened her. The gloomy shadow that fell upon her sister so early in life seems, in my anxious eyes, to gather over her, ever darker, ever darker. Dear Margaret, dear Margaret! But we must hope."

The hand-carriage was spinning away before us at a most indecorous pace for an invalid vehicle, and was making most irregular curves upon the sand. Mr. Slinkton, noticing it, said:

"If I may judge from appearances, your friend will be upset, Mr. Sampson."

"It looks probable, certainly," said I.

"The servant must be drunk."

"The servants of old gentlemen will get drunk sometimes," said I.

"The major draws very light, Mr. Sampson."

"The major does draw light," said I.

By this time the carriage, much to my relief, was lost in the darkness. We walked on for a little, side by side over the sand, in silence. After a short while he said, in a voice still affected by the emotion that his niece's state of health had awakened in him,

"Do you stay here long, Mr. Sampson?"

"Why, no. I am going away tonight."

"So soon? But business always holds you in request. Men like Mr. Sampson are too important to others, to be spared to their own need of relaxtaion and enjoyment."

"I don't know about that," said I. "However, I am going back. To London."

"I shall be there too, soon after you."

I knew that as well as he did. But I did not tell him so. Any more than I told him what defensive weapon my right hand rested on in my pocket, as I walked by his side. Any more than I told him why I did not walk on the sea side of him with the night closing in.

We left the beach, and our ways diverged. We exchanged good night, and had parted indeed, when he said, returning,

"Mr. Sampson, *may* I ask? Poor Meltham, whom we spoke of — dead yet?"

"Not when I last heard of him; but too broken a man to live long, and hopelessly lost to his old calling."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said he, with great feeling. "Sad, sad, sad! The world is a grave!" And so went his way.

It was not his fault if the world were not a grave; but I did not call that ob-

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servation after him, any more than I had mentioned those other things just now enumerated. He went his way, and I went mine with all expedition. This happened, as I have said, either at the end of September or beginning of October. The next time I saw him, and the last, was late in November.

I HAD a very particular engagement to breakfast in the Temple. It was a bitter northeasterly morning, and the sleet and slush lay inches deep in the streets. I could get no conveyance, and was soon wet to the knees; but I should have been true to that appointment, though I had to wade to it up to my neck in the same impediments.

The appointment took me to some chambers in the Temple. They were at the top of a lonely corner house overlooking the river. The name, MR. ALFRED BECKWITH, was painted on the outer door. On the door opposite, on the same landing, the name MR. JULIUS SLINKTON. The doors of both sets of chambers stood open, so that anything said aloud in one set could be heard in the other.

I had never been in those chambers before. They were dismal, close, unwholesome, and oppressive; the furniture, originally good, and not yet old, was faded and dirty — the rooms were in great disorder; there was a strong prevailing smell of opium, brandy, and tobacco; the grate and fire-irons were splashed all over with unsightly blotches of rust; and on a sofa by the fire, in the room where breakfast had been prepared, lay the host, Mr. Beckwith, a man with all the appearances of the worst kind of drunkard, very far advanced upon his shameful way to death.

"Slinkton is not come yet," said this creature, staggering up when I went in; "I'll call him — Halloa! Julius Caesar! Come and drink!" As he hoarsely roared this out, he beat the poker and tongs together in a mad way, as if that were his usual manner of summoning his associate.

The voice of Mr. Slinkton was heard through the clatter from the opposite side of the staircase, and he came in. He had not expected the pleasure of meeting me. I have seen several artful men brought to a stand, but I never saw a man so aghast as he was when his eyes rested on mine.

"Julius Caesar," cried Beckwith, staggering between us, "Mist' Sampson! Mist' Sampson, Julius Caesar! Julius, Mist' Sampson, is the friend of my soul. Julius keeps me plied with liquor, morning, noon, and night. Julius is a real benefactor. Julius threw the tea and coffee out of window when I used to have any. Julius empties all the water-jugs of their contents, and fills 'em with spirits. Julius winds me up and keeps me going — Boil the brandy, Julius!"

There was a rusty and furred saucepan in the ashes — the ashes looked like the accumulation of weeks — and Beckwith, rolling and staggering between us as if he were going to plunge headlong into the fire, got the saucepan out, and tried to force it into Slinkton's hand.

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"Boil the brandy, Julius Caesar! ome! Do your usual office. Boil the randy!"

He became so fierce in his gesticula- ons with the saucepan, that I ex- ected to see him lay open Slinkton's ead with it. I therefore put out my and to check him. He reeled back) the sofa, and sat there panting, aking, and red-eyed, in his rags of ressing-gown, looking at us both. noticed then that there was nothing) drink on the table but brandy, and othing to eat but salted herrings, and hot, sickly, highly-peppered stew.

"At all events, Mr. Sampson," said linkton, offering me the smooth ravel path for the last time, "I thank ou for interfering between me and is unfortunate man's violence. How- ver you came here, Mr. Sampson, or ith whatever motive you came here, t least I thank you for that."

Without gratifying his desire to now how I came there, I said, quietly, How is your niece, Mr. Slinkton?"

He looked hard at me, and I looked ard at him.

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Sampson, hat my niece has proved treacherous nd ungrateful to her best friend. She eft me without a word of notice or xplanation. She was misled, no doubt, y some designing rascal. Perhaps you ay have heard of it."

"I did hear that she was misled by a esigning rascal. In fact, I have proof f it."

"Are you sure of that?" said he.

"Quite."

"Boil the brandy," muttered Beck- with. "Company to breakfast, Julius Caesar. Do your usual office — pro- vide the usual breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. Boil the brandy!"

The eyes of Slinkton looked from him to me, and he said, after a mo- ment's consideration,

"Mr. Sampson, you are a man of the world, and so am I. I will be plain with you."

"And I tell you you will not," said I. "I know all about you. *You* plain with any one? Nonsense, nonsense!"

"I plainly tell you, Mr. Sampson," he went on, with a manner almost composed, "that I understand your object. You want to save your funds, and escape from your liabilities; these are old tricks of trade with you Office- gentlemen. But you will not do it, sir; you will not succeed. You have not an easy adversary to play against, when you play against me. We shall have to inquire, in due time, when and how Mr. Beckwith fell into his present habits. With that remark, sir, I put this poor creature, and his incoherent wanderings of speech, aside, and wish you a good morning and a better case next time."

While he was saying this, Beckwith had filled a half-pint glass with brandy. At this moment, he threw the brandy at his face, and threw the glass after it. Slinkton put his hands up, half blinded with the spirit, and cut with the glass across the forehead. At the sound of the breakage, a fourth person came into the room, closed the door, and stood at it; he was a very quiet but very keen-looking man, with iron-

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grey hair, and slightly lame.

Slinkton pulled out his handkerchief, assuaged the pain in his smarting eyes, and dabbled the blood on his forehead. He was a long time about it, and I saw that in the doing of it, a tremendous change came over him, occasioned by the change in Beckwith — who ceased to pant and tremble, sat upright, and never took his eyes off him. I never in my life saw a face in which abhorrence and determination were so forcibly painted as in Beckwith's then.

"Look at me, you villain," said Beckwith, "and see me as I really am. I took these rooms, to make them a trap for you. I came into them as a drunkard, to bait the trap for you. You fell into the trap, and you will never leave it alive. On the morning when you last went to Mr. Sampson's office, I had seen him first. Your plot has been known to both of us, all along, and you have been counterplotted all along. What? Having been cajoled into putting that prize of two thousand pounds in your power, I was to be done to death with brandy, and, brandy not proving quick enough, with something quicker? Have I never seen you, when you thought my senses gone, pouring from your little bottle into my glass? Why, you Murderer and Forger, alone here with you in the dead of night, as I have so often been, I have had my hand upon the trigger of a pistol, twenty times, to blow your brains out!"

This sudden starting up of the thing that he had supposed to be his imbecile victim into a determined man, wit a settled resolution to hunt him dow and be the death of him, mercilessl expressed from head to foot, was, i the first shock, too much for hir Without any figure of speech, he stag gered under it. But there is no greate mistake than to suppose that a ma who is a calculating criminal, is, i any phase of his guilt, otherwise tha true to himself, and perfectly cor sistent with his whole character. Suc a man commits murder, and murde is the natural culmination of hi course; such a man has to outfac murder, and will do it with hardihoo and effrontery. It is a sort of fashion t express surprise that any notoriou criminal, having such crime upon hi conscience, can so brave it out. Do yo think that if he had it on his con science at all, or had a conscience t have it upon, he would ever hav committed the crime?

Perfectly consistent with himsel as I believe all such monsters to be this Slinkton recovered himself, an showed a defiance that was sufficientl cold and quiet. He was white, he wa haggard, he was changed; but only a a sharper who had played for a grea stake and had been outwitted.

"Listen to me, you villain," sai Beckwith, "and let every word yo hear me say be a stab in your wicke heart. When I took these rooms, t throw myself in your way and lea you on to the scheme that I knew m appearance and supposed characte and habits would suggest to such devil, how did I know that? Becaus

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ou were no stranger to me. I knew ou well. And I knew you to be the ruel wretch who, for so much money, ad killed one innocent girl while she rusted him implicitly, and who was y inches killing another."

Slinkton took out a snuff-box, took pinch of snuff, and laughed.

"But see here," said Beckwith, ever looking away, never raising his oice, never relaxing his face, never nclenching his hand. "See what a ull wolf you have been, after all! he infatuated drunkard who never rank a fiftieth part of the liquor you lied him with, but poured it away, ere, there, everywhere — almost be- ore your eyes; who brought over the ellow you set to watch him and to ply im, by outbidding you in his bribe, efore he had been at his work three lays — with whom you have observed o caution, yet who was so bent on idding the earth of you as a wild east, that he should have defeated ou if you had been ever so prudent — that drunkard whom you have, nany a time, left on the floor of this oom, and who has even let you go ut of it, alive and undeceived, when ou have turned him over with your oot — has, almost as often, on the ame night, within an hour, within a ew minutes, watched you awake, ad his hand at your pillow when you ere asleep, turned over your papers, aken samples from your bottles and ackets of powder, changed their ontents, rifled every secret of your ife!"

He had had another pinch of snuff in his hand, but had gradually let it drop from between his fingers to the floor; where he now smoothed it out with his foot, looking down at it the while.

"That drunkard," said Beckwith, "who had free access to your rooms at all times, that he might drink the strong drinks that you left in his way and be the sooner ended, holding no more terms with you than he would hold with a tiger, has had his master-key for all your locks, his test for all your poisons, his clue to your cipher-writing. He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, how long it took to complete that deed, what doses there were, what intervals, what signs of gradual decay upon mind and body; what distempered fancies were produced, what observable changes, what physical pain. He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, that all this was recorded day by day, as a lesson of experience for future service. He can tell you, better than you can tell him, where that journal is now."

Slinkton stopped the action of his foot, and looked at Beckwith.

"No," said the latter, as if answering a question from him. "Not in the drawer of the writing-desk that opens with a spring; it is not there, and it never will be there again."

"Then you are a thief!" said Slinkton.

Without any change whatever in the inflexible purpose, which it was quite terrific even to me to contemplate, and from the power of which I had always felt convinced it

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was impossible for this wretch to escape, Beckwith returned,

"I am your niece's shadow, too."

With an imprecation Slinkton put his hand to his head, tore out some hair, and flung it to the ground. It was the end of the smooth walk; he destroyed it in the action, and it will soon be seen that his use for it was past.

Beckwith went on: "Whenever you left here, I left here. Although I understood that you found it necessary to pause in the completion of that purpose, to avert suspicion, still I watched you close, with the poor confiding girl. When I had the diary, and could read it word by word — it was only about the night before your last visit to Scarborough — you remember the night? you slept with a small flat vial tied to your wrist — I sent to Mr. Sampson, who was kept out of view. This is Mr. Sampson's trusty servant standing by the door. We three saved your niece among us."

Slinkton looked at us all, took an uncertain step or two from the place where he had stood, returned to it, and glanced about him in a very curious way — as one of the meaner reptiles might, looking for a hole to hide in. I noticed at the same time, that a singular change took place in the figure of the man — as if it collapsed within his clothes, and they consequently became ill-shapen and ill-fitting.

"You shall know," said Beckwith, "for I hope the knowledge will be bitter and terrible to you, why you have been pursued by one man, and why, when the whole interest that Mr. Sampson represents would have expended any money in hunting you down, you have been tracked to death at a single individual's charge. I hear you have had the name of Meltham on your lips sometimes?"

I saw, in addition to those other changes, a sudden stoppage come upon his breathing.

"When you sent the sweet girl whom you murdered (you know with what artfully made-out surroundings and probabilities you sent her) to Meltham's office, before taking her abroad to originate the transaction that doomed her to the grave, it fell to Meltham's lot to see her and to speak with her. It did not fall to his lot to save her, though I know he would freely give his own life to have done it. He admired her — I would say he loved her deeply, if I thought it possible that you could understand the word. When she was sacrificed, he was thoroughly assured of your guilt. Having lost her, he had but one object left in life, and that was to avenge her and destroy you.

"That man Meltham," Beckwith steadily pursued, "was as absolutely certain that you could never elude him in this world, if he devoted himself to your destruction with his utmost fidelity and earnestness, and if he divided the sacred duty with no other duty in life, as he was certain that in achieving it he would be a poor instrument in the hands of Providence, and would do well before

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eaven in striking you out from nong living men. I am that man, and thank God I have done my work!"

If Slinkton had been running for his e from swift-footed savages, a dozen iles, he could not have shown more nphatic signs of being oppressed at art and laboring for breath, than showed now, when he looked at the ırsuer who had so relentlessly hunted m down.

"You never saw me under my right ıme before; you see me under my ght name now. You shall see me ıce again in the body, when you are ied for your life. You shall see me ıce again in the spirit, when the ord is round your neck, and the owd are crying against you!"

When Meltham had spoken these st words, the miscreant suddenly ırned away his face, and seemed to rike his mouth with his open hand. t the same instant, the room was lled with a new and powerful odor, ıd, almost at the same instant, he roke into a crooked run, leap, start - I have no name for the spasm — ıd fell, with a dull weight that shook ıe heavy old doors and windows.

That was the fitting end of him.

When we saw that he was dead, we rew away from the room, and Mel- ıam, giving me his hand, said, wearily, "I have no more work on earth, my friend. But I shall see her again elsewhere."

It was in vain that I tried to rally him. He might have saved her, he said; he had not saved her, and he reproached himself; he had lost her, and he was broken-hearted.

"The purpose that sustained me is over, Sampson, and there is nothing now to hold me to life. I am not fit for life; I am weak and spiritless; I have no hope and no object."

In truth, I could hardly have believed that the broken man who then spoke to me was the man who had so strongly and so differently impressed me when his purpose was before him. I used such entreaties with him, as I could; but he still said, and always said, in a patient, undemonstrative way — nothing could avail him — he was broken-hearted.

He died early in the next spring. He was buried by the side of the poor young lady for whom he had cherished those tender and unhappy regrets; and he left all he had to her sister. She lived to be a happy wife and mother; she married my sister's son, who succeeded poor Meltham; she is living now, and her children ride about the garden on my walking-stick when I go to see her.

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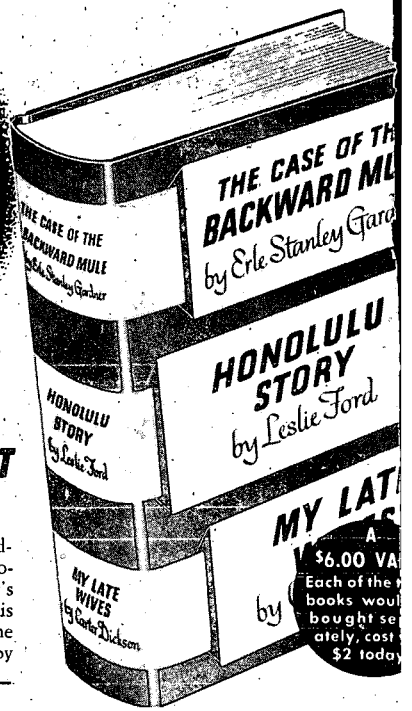

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